SKELETTA

AND THE

WHITE KNIGHT

ISOBEL JAMIESON

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BY

ISOBEL JAMIESON

AUTHOR OF
'THE GINGER-BEER STANDARD'

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THIS MIXTURE OF FACT AND FICTION

is dedicated to

THE REAL SKIPPER

(WHO IS NOT QUITE SUCH A "WHITE KNIGHT")

and to

THE REAL FRIEND

(WHO IS NOT QUITE SO "DON"ISH)

in gratitude

FOR THEIR KIND APPRECIATION OF THE FACTS

and

EVEN KINDER FORGIVENESS OF THE FICTION

Skeletta and the White Knight.

I.

I SUPPOSE we have all skeletons in our cupboards: ours is a yacht. It is a much more inconvenient kind than most, for it won't fit into the ordinary or family cupboard, and we have to hire one to fit it in a yacht-builder's yard. There is no use suggesting to Jack to sell her by persuading him that a newer or smaller boat would suit us better. He would placidly agree, as he would to the idea that a newer and younger wife would also be an improvement, but it would bring him no nearer selling the one than divorcing the other. So there she is, either eating her bowsprit off at considerable expense to us, or else being in commission and ruining us completely. I do not call ourselves the New Poor, because we

were poor before, but of that kind of poorness that overspends its income and yet somehow comes right in the end; now we cannot even afford to overspend! And, of course, hide it as we may, every one seems to know we own a yacht, and so think we can afford lots of things that we cannot.

Last year we suddenly decided to make a virtue of necessity, a pet of our skeleton, and have it out and play with it ourselves, even if we could not afford all the conventional attributes of clanking chains and mysterious lights, or—— But let me disentangle myself from this metaphor, and say plainly that we decided to have the summer on board, but to dispense with a paid crew. Nobody who has not tried it knows all this means; certainly I didn't. Jack pretends he did, but that is only because the *Skeletta* can do no wrong in his eyes, and all the awful labour her service entails is a work of love to him. We began operations by a visit of inspection to the cupboard early in April. Sailing-yachts when pulled up look so coggly—like cocked hats standing on their crowns,—but they are dreadfully solid when it comes to lifting them, and that part at least could hardly be undertaken by ourselves. Jack revels in a shipping yard. He will gaze almost indefinitely at the "lines" of a boat, while it is still more

lines than boat to my eyes. He will inquire exhaustively into the prices of dinghys and anchors and masses of things he has neither means nor intention of buying, and, above all, spend interminable periods talking to the old boss about everything except our business, and generally next door to the wood-cutting saw! I have to hang about with him trying to seem intelligent and not to seem tired, both difficult after a few hours.

I admit that something more must be done in building-yards than I have ever seen, for the boats do actually get built, and the cocked-hat ones are somehow got off their precarious crutches and into the water. One of the most trying parts of the whole matter to an anxious housewife is the apparent disregard for and indifference to mere money. Jack will airily say—

"Yes, I think two new coats of paint would do, and, of course, touch up the gilding inside. The running gear won't need much, but just give her new whiskers and topping lifts; and better put in another ten fathoms of chain—and what about a little ballast aft?" and so on. Then in a small voice I say—

"Jack, how much will that cost?"

"Oh, I don't know—not very much."

"Well, but do ask."

"No, no; they can't estimate on the spot.

It will be all right. Anyhow, *they're all things that must be done.*"

That is the real skeletonishness of the whole matter. Jack just cannot be stern with *Skeletta*. If she wants a new dress of paint, or any little article of vertu like an anchor, she has got to have it. The house and I can never make good our claims against her. For her it is always either "safety" that is the reason, or because it is "cheaper in the long-run." My fear is that we shan't be still running by the time the cheapness is obvious.

As I admitted, boats do eventually get put on the water, for ours was there when we returned to see in June. A boat is so unlike a house. If you have workmen in the latter, the only way to get them out again is to be there all the time yourself; but a boat is like a picnic kettle trying to boil—if you watch it, it won't. Had we stayed at the yard, I am convinced every day would have been like the first—all standing about and desultory talking of an amiable, aimless, West Highland kind.

Skeletta, like other people, looks best in her own element, and the queer top-heavy object of the yard was now a graceful dignified creature lying quietly at moorings in the harbour. My heart softened towards her. I enjoy looking at pretty women even when Jack admires them,

and *Skeletta* looked deliciously feminine and sure of herself as she lay gently swaying to the swell and airing her new white sails as if spreading out the folds of a Court train. The uninitiated might suppose all we had to do was to go on board and sail away. Mon Dieu ! Quelle idée ! Jack said as much, only in Anglo-Saxon !

Now we could begin, I was told.

" How ? Where ? " from ignorant me.

The store, of course, and go over the inventory.

" Then let's go now at once, or we will be caught up into conversation near the machinery."

" At once " is, of course, a hyperbolic figure of speech ; but having found the boss, he in time directed us to the foreman, who sent a boy to find the clerk, who went to a distant shed to find *Skeletta's* keys, and having returned, conducted us to the store. A yacht's store is rather like a section of empty honeycomb on a Brobdingnagian scale, all built of open woodwork to allow a thorough circulation of air. One of the pleasures of a yachting life is that everything you own is feverishly prone to either mildew or rust.

Jack had the inventory in a note-book which lives habitually near his heart, or, anyhow, somewhere in his waistcoat, and he suggested that I should sit down and check off the things as he called them out. I felt pleasingly capable of

this, more as if I had got a speaking part at last. There wasn't anything to sit on, but Jack hauled out one of the water-breakers and up-ended it, and that did excellently.

"Why are they called breakers instead of barrels?" But the only answer I got was more nautical language from Jack, who had tripped over a rope and saved himself from falling by grasping the binnacle, which was generously coated in thick grease. Having partially cleaned him, to the complete destruction of both our handkerchiefs, I reseated myself and opened my little book. The writing was certainly not Jack's, but it was painstakingly legible, and began—

"1 mast.
1 bowsprit.
1 boom."

"Is there any use going over that sort of thing?" I asked. "After all, they must be on her. You might just as well have begun—

'1 deck.
1 keel.
1 rudder.'"

Jack was paying small attention, for he was endeavouring to move the mountain composed of old sails, so I continued to read my list—

"4 egg-spoons.
1 toast-rack.
1 binnigale."

My head reeled! But when Jack emerged and explained that his crew had laid up the boat last time and made the inventory, I cheered up considerably. If this was what one paid untold gold to and bought blue suits and brass buttons for, I could do very well myself, and the skeleton would not be very hard to manage after all. This bright thought certainly helped me to get through the inventory; it is about all it did do.

The gear was all supposed to be on board, but like the wheels in amateur clock-mending, there are always some over; and trying to recognise yards and yards—I mean fathoms and fathoms—of loose rope involved at intervals in blocks seems to be difficult even to the nautically minded. For myself, I felt as useful as the boy in 'Peter Pan' when he picks up the lost shadow by one toe and says, "No, no one I know."

Then there are innumerable bits of wire and cord and blocks and shackles and rings and hooks-and-eyes—all wanted,—each one, according to Jack, capable of saving the situation if —well, if the situation arose in which they could save it! Lewis Carroll made the White Knight appear funny because he was on horseback; on a yacht he would just have been an ordinary capable, decently far-seeing skipper. On a properly run yacht such emergencies as

are equivalent to the White Knight's needing a mouse-trap while riding must all be provided for by any self-respecting sailor-man.

After some hours, with only a momentary lull for sandwiches and a flask, we were finished with the store. There remained even then a certain residue which Jack with difficulty consented to leave behind, but only because even he could not diagnose it !

That night we spent in the local inn, and not even the broken concrete of which the mattress was apparently made prevented me from sleeping the sleep of a schoolboy. (The merely " just " probably have their off-nights.) The next day we began with getting all our heavy luggage over to the yard. Some friend once said to me, " At least, when you are going to a boat and not a house, you cannot have much luggage to take." Oh, irony ! A White Knight's packing is a dreadful thing. Begin with clothes. Well, you have every likelihood of being frequently wet, and very little likelihood of getting any washing done, so that means about as many changes of undies as you possess, and umpteen pairs of stockings. Then there are several different climates to be arranged for. I do not mean that the cruise extends from polar seas to the equator, but the difference between sailing in a hard north-east wind and rain and

lying becalmed on a grilling west-coast day is almost as great. How often, later, was I to suffer from dressing to sail and then going ashore instead! But even when all Jack's clothes and mine were put together—oil-skins, sea-boots, everything,—that was only a nucleus. The principal boxes consisted of articles whose breakableness and peculiar shapes and weights made the prospect of their travelling together precarious, if not impossible. The only way is to roll them and line them and cover them with all the clothes already mentioned. This naturally makes the unpacking as chaotic as the inventory. It was just masts and tea-spoons indiscriminately again, but represented by fishing gear and pyjamas, jumpers and compasses, field-glasses and groceries! We packed in a large empty room; we unpacked in a crowded shed near the water, transferring everything to the dinghy, and then conveying it on board.

Skeletta's interior is as charming as her outside would lead you to expect. Every one who visited us assured us of that, and I think truly I took the same sort of pleasure in hearing her praised as the mother of a society daughter does, even though the girl may be expensive to keep and difficult to live with! I find *Skeletta* both, but am proud of her all the same. There is a dear little main cabin, which we pride our-

selves is less like a third-class railway carriage than that of many yachts I have seen. The sofas on either side are covered in bright cretonne instead of the furnishing plush beloved of yacht-fitters, which in a restricted space nearly pulls your skirt off while trying to squeeze past it to your seat at table. Then the skylight is big in proportion, and the light twinkles in the racks of tumblers and upside-down wine-glasses, and is reflected from an oval gilt mirror into the bookcase, filled with what I still quite erroneously and pathetically call 7d. books. It is altogether like a dear little boudoir, and nothing indicates that the back of the sofas let down and form the beds at night.

Forward of this is the fo'c'sle, where the crew of Jack's comparatively wealthy bachelor and pre-war days had their being. I was glad at first that they were not there, for if a miniature sitting-room is attractive, a miniature kitchen is much more so. It so exactly realised the ambition of my childhood really to live in the doll's house. If a good fairy had granted me that wish then, the stupidest of them would have realised that something would have to be done about making my own size suitable; but the bad fairy who made Jack so wedded to *Skeletta* forgot all about that, so my first joy of possession vanished very quickly in the pains

of doing everything bent double, and even then getting hurt on all protuberances of my anatomy !

Right at the stern is the Owner's cabin. It seems odd that so " swanky " an expression is considered good form ! I can't imagine its being used with much acceptance on land ! In this case the Owner and Owneress have a very jolly little cabin—why not " state-room " while we are at it ? Real undisguised berths with really truly spring-mattresses and an immense number of blankets ! I could not believe at first that more than three could be borne, but half a night of shivers was all that was required in the way of argument. After all, sleeping below the water-line, with only an inch of wood between you and the water, makes a very different temperature from sleeping in a house.

We spent all one day making dinghy journeys with our heterogeneous belongings, and sorting them out on board. The blankets were already *in situ,* so we made up the two after-berths, and in spite of the surrounding mess, determined to sleep on board that night, urged strongly thereto by the remembrance of the " family and commercial " beds ashore. If I really slept less well, it is no reflection on the berths, which are truly comfy ; but their size and nearness to the roof (I don't think Jack would call the underside of the deck a roof,

but I want to be understood of my fellow-landlubbers) made my thoughts turn to that cheery hymn about soon lying each within our narrow bed.

I was sleeping quietly enough when a male voice, apparently an inch from my head, growled out, " Are ye wantin' ony fresh herrin' ? " My half-waking thoughts immediately flew back to a dreary moment in a nursing-home, when my chloroformed wits thought I heard the doctor ordering me six herring every four hours. I thought it a particularly revolting treatment, and was later relieved to find he had said heroin !

" Are ye no wantin' ony herrin' ? " I was properly awake this time, but felt unable to cope with household shopping at 6 A.M., arrayed in a nightie, so with a cry of " Wait a moment," directed vaguely towards the skylight, I woke Jack to attend to this importunate and matutinal fishmonger. It seemed nothing out of the way to him, and he scuttled on deck and exchanged views on the fushin' with the voice, and received a dozen herring into the bailer. When Jack came down below again and told me this, I naturally inquired what on earth he wanted with a dozen herring when we had nothing to cook them with or in, the stoves not being unpacked nor any petrol on board, and every cooking-pot a disgusting mass of

grease. I might have known the White Knight's answer.

"Well, we might use them for bait."

There was not the slightest likelihood of having time to fish for anything but our belongings, until the herring would be in a state to horrify even a lobster, but I said naught. I was gradually learning the gospel of "In Case," which seems to rule those who go down to the sea in ships!

We did not fish in the evening, but Jack thought I would like to row round in the dinghy. This, of course, meant he wanted to. Personally I hate little boats for anything but their necessary work of taking one from shore to yacht, and their even more endearing ability of taking one from yacht to shore. But having voluntarily taken the leading lady's part in a nautical comedy, I meant to act with real conviction.

Rowing around to please me soon developed into a desire to take soundings in what appeared to me an obviously impossible passage among seaweed and rocks.

"Have you never come this way before, Jack?"

"Oh no; we always go out by the south passage."

"Then why do you want to know about this

one, which looks more fitted for a conger-eel ? "

" Because we might want to use it. You might have a steamer coming in and another going out in the main passage, or the fishing fleet on the move or another yacht in the way, and it would be jolly useful to be able to slip round this way."

" Is there depth enough ? "

" Of course there is at high water."

" I wonder if your supposititious stream of traffic would necessarily happen at high water ? "

" Oh, of course if you do not want to take soundings which might be useful, just say so."

" My dear, of course I want to. It might be very useful—' in case.' Besides, I don't know how you do it, and would love to watch you."

" Well, I will do the rowing, and as I know whereabouts I want the soundings, you take the lead-line."

It was under the stern sheets (why not say stern seats ?), and after fishing out a sponge, a slimy chamois, and a spare rowlock, I found the required article, apparently a deep-sea line with an abnormal weight and fortunately no hooks. I was instructed to uncoil " about six fathoms." I unwound what I imagined might answer that description. Suddenly backing with

his oars Jack shouted, "Now." I hurled the weight overboard with such zeal that the beastly thing went leaping out in loops and knots, taking with it the slimy chamois in its coils, like a boa-constrictor with a rabbit. I gazed hypnotised, till an unexpected tug jerked the whole thing out of my paralysed hands, and Jack leaped forward and caught it with suitable language accompaniment.

Jack bore it well, considering how serious these matters are in his sight, and I restrained my nervous giggles for the same reason. I was then instructed with minute care and overwhelming patience, and we began again. This time all went well, except that I let out the creature —I mean the thing—so carefully that we were quite in the wrong place by the time the line had gone loose in my hand. But Jack was now out more for my instruction than his own requirements, so he asked me patiently, "How's that?"

"I don't know, because it reached the bottom, I think."

"I mean"—more patience—"how much is that?"

"I don't know. How can I know? Shall I haul it in and measure it?"

"Yes."

I did—yards and yards of it,—and it dripped up my sleeves and froze my hands.

"Well, what's the first mark?"

I now noticed, I am afraid for the first time, that there were various curious tags tied on to the line, so with confidence I answered—

"A little white thing."

"Good; that's five fathoms."

By this time it was quite dark, and I supposed that here ended the first lesson in soundings, and I rejoiced. I do not really mind being taught things, even dull things, if Jack enjoys enlightening my dark ignorance; but I do hate it when, as well as making you feel stupid, it chills you to the bone and numbs your hands, and keeps you sitting on a relentlessly hard seat with your knees near your nose. But instead of turning homewards Jack stolidly rowed on, and presently commanded me again to swing the lead. I began to see why this expression came to mean malingering. I had thoughts myself of pretending to be suddenly ill and so get away from this dark, damp, d—d business, but I stuck to it. Over went the now almost invisible line.

"How is that?"

I hauled in a few yards and felt something.

"I can't see."

"Can you not see whether it is red or white?"

"No, I can't."

"Then bite it."

"Bite it!" Gasps from me. "But I can't see any better with my teeth."

Horrible thought! Is this another accomplishment necessary for the complete yachtswoman? Then a voice of disgustingly patient resignation suggestive of humouring the insane—

"No; but perhaps you will then be able to discover whether the tag is linen, flannel, or leather."

A faint light began to dawn upon me—idiot that I was! I had not noticed that the different colours were also different materials. I was much comforted by this touch of plain shore-sense amongst all the sea jargon! Soundings never again enthralled me very much. When such expeditions seemed imminent I generally contrived to be busy in other ways, and the loss of my society was no doubt made up to Jack by the accuracy of his observations.

The next two days we spent in a sort of spring cleaning. Everything in the fo'c'sle had to be cleansed of its protecting grease with petrol, and everything hauled out of the sail-locker and stowed back into it. This last process seemed to me like an exhibition of second sight, or some such occult faculty. The sail-locker has a door into it from the after-cabin—a door about two feet square. Through this Jack inserted the

upper half of his person, and then seizing his prey inside, wiggled it out from under him in an admirably acrobatic manner. Out would come a hefty hank of rope. "Topsail sheet" booms the voice. Then another hank, apparently the twin of the first. "Reef pennant," announces the oracle. As it went on I was guilty of a doubt that Jack was just showing off and making up the names as he went along, but I did not suppose it mattered. Judging from the number of ropes already on deck, those could never be wanted even "in case." Then the game was continued with sails. Jack came out of the hole for this, for it took us both to haul through the masses of thick canvas that had been stowed inside. Even the little sails of an 18-ton cutter looked very large in the cabin. I don't know whether they look worse all loose like demented bales of material, or when they come out like laidly worms—yards upon yards neatly sausaged. Jack explained that "in stops" was the proper expression. My doubts about Jack's *bona fides* were confirmed when he professed to know a second jib from a stay-sail the moment he laid hands on it, and I determined to show him that I was not so ignorantly credulous as he evidently imagined, so openly accused him of sheer "swank." He bore with me without reproach, merely point-

ing in silence to the fact that their names are stencilled on them at the head. I humbly apologised, and asked for an explanation of the rope business. But to know them was, as I had feared, the result of a lifetime of study and skill. Not that Jack said so: he seemed to imagine it a matter of mere intelligence. What should I do if he ever sent me to find the "trysail sheets," or some such thing! As Marie Claire, when she lost her handkerchief in the Convent, used to pray to St Anthony, "Faîtes que je trouve mon mouchoir, faîtes que je trouve mon mouchoir," I shall have to pray to a specially seafaring saint if I can find one, "Faîtes que je trouve le right thing." I do not think it would be fair to worry him with the technical expression. It may have changed since his day.

A week on board proved one thing incontrovertibly: a crew of some sort we must have. The two of us alone in an 18-tonner—even one with all the virtues of *Skeletta*—were like Alice and the Red Queen running hard in order to stand still! We were so occupied just living that it was impossible to undertake sailing as well! Also, I am sorry to say, it became obvious, "even to the meanest intelligence," as Jack most ungallantly said, that pure goodwill alone does not make a yachtswoman, even when backed by hard work and a histrionic sense!

For my instruction we rehearsed the preliminaries of getting under weigh : it gave me a bitter feeling against the irresponsible poets who dismiss the whole operation with a casual remark, " The anchor's weighed," and at once proceed to irrelevant and simple matters such as pirating or the discussion of religion or art !

Of course, we never got the length of the poets, for we never went to the extreme measure of getting the anchor up at all. The Patient One admitted he " couldn't do everything," which was a tactful way of expressing the opinion that I " couldn't do anything." I had been under the impression that I could steer a sailing-boat, but it had always been a small dinghy affair, with Jack sitting beside me ; but to be left alone to steer with the only help more than fifty feet away from me was too awful a prospect ! I knew Jack would be fifty feet away, for that is the length of the deck, and it seems a necessary part of sailing that the novice should be isolated while the skipper is involved in operations afar and howls unintelligible directions to the flustered and unhappy tyro. A crew in the sense of paid hands was completely impossible. Only optimism enabled us to face the bill for launching and laying up ; but a crew " are mercenary men," who expect something more on account than

optimism ! We began to think over our friends and acquaintances. Yachting ability is a new scale of measurement to apply to them, and most of them failed completely to fit into it.

As a matter for jest every one knows the kind of man described " as the horsiest man afoot and the footiest man ahorse," but his nautical prototype is less known, at least on our east-windy side of the country, which is not a boating or yachting one. But blue serge, white trousers, and a yachting cap do not necessarily imply more ability than is required to go below to " take an observation ! " and this seafaring expression about sums up their knowledge of nautical terms ! Such as these would be no use to us. We could think of any number who would certainly accept an invitation. " Yachting ! Rather ! I should love it ! Such a jolly peaceful sort of holiday. Only how do you manage about exercise ? " No, they wouldn't do either. To me the problem of how to manage without ever sitting quiet for ten minutes was more puzzling. Filling up the tanks with fresh water is a splendid occupation for those in search of " exercise." The instructions sound simple enough—you take the water-breakers ashore, fill them at the nearest burn, and bring them back and empty them on deck into the tanks below. Each breaker holds six

gallons, and so weighs when full about 70 lb., by no means a herculean job! It is a little different in practice. The "nearest" burn may be near enough—only ten minutes' rowing possibly,—but to fill a barrel from a very shallow stream on the shore is not very feasible, so one must go up the burn x number of yards to find a suitable pool. The filling takes just long enough to make your bent back ache. Then the full breaker has to be lifted—and these excellent articles are so contrived that you can only get hold of them with the last two joints of the fingers! I don't know why, but I know it is so! Stumbling down the beach with the full breaker is a much worse job than going up it with an empty one, and you can't relieve your feelings and aching muscles by dumping it into the boat when you reach it, or it will probably stave in a plank! Having rowed back —which is quite a relaxation—the things have then to be lifted on board,—a height of about three feet. As the dinghy is far from steady, and seems animated with a desire to wander from the side of the yacht at the critical moment, the operation is more perilous than it sounds; but still it is done with efficiency, if with neither ease nor grace, the first time! The real beauty of the job for those in search of exercise is that it has to be repeated at least four times! When

it is over, the exercise lover is pleased enough to know that the water supply is now sufficient for about six days.

Jack thought over all the men who used to sail with him in the old crew-paying days, and tried to think which had shown any tendency to work. The chief trouble was that most of them had got married, and I did not want a strange wife. I felt I didn't want to know any woman as well as *Skeletta* would insist on our doing! Men are so different; one can somehow know them so well without having to know them too well; women have a tendency to include both their souls and their in'ards in a friendship!

At last, through a process more of elimination than selection, we decided on two men—Jim Stuart and Ian Kennedy. They were at least both bachelors, and although they had never actually sailed with Jack, they had been heard to talk quite intelligently about boats, and had apparently done sailing of some sort—whether open boats or 50-tonners remained to be discovered.

II.

The last week of July was chosen as the date for the "crew" to sign on, as by then the Courts would have risen and the University vacation have begun. We had to wait on both these events, as Stuart, always known to us as the Don, is a professor, and Ian Kennedy a barrister, whose penchant for everything Gaelic has made his less Gaelic-loving friends call him the Dhuiné-Wassail. My knowledge of both these men was of the dinner-party order, and I could guarantee the quality of their conversation; but my mind misgave me as to their ability as deck-hands, let alone as bottle-washers! The Don not only is a professor, but looks one —he would even do for a stage one! He is absent-minded in practical matters, pragmatical on abstract ones, pedantic in speech, and very short-sighted. Jack assures me he knows more about yachting than his appearance might lead you to suppose. "For instance, he was telling

me in the Club how difficult it was to get sea-boots without woolly linings."

I felt I dared not ask for further explanation —perhaps it was symbolical, and woolly linings were typical of the ease-loving stay-at-home who basely desires to keep his feet warm.

When I was next alone in the after-cabin, I hauled my shiny new sea-boots out of their locker. Yes, there they were, lined to the brim with comfy damning wool! I had thoughts of shaving them with Jack's razor, but abandoned the idea when I remembered he only used the real throat-cutting article and not the nice little lawn-mowers. It still remained to be seen if Mr Kennedy was also a hardy un-wool-lined salt. I rather imagined he wouldn't be, and then I would have a companion in disgrace.

We spent a few feverish days getting the ship ready for inspection. Jack, of course, fussed over everything as if *Skeletta* were his débutante daughter. I felt more like the step-mother—but a quite nice step-mother!

Brass fittings look very smart, but there is a quite definite limit to my zeal in brass-cleaning which pains poor Jack, especially as I am not allowed to use any liquid cleaning material in case I spot the decks! The only really rewarding bits to polish are the large shiny bald

head of the rudder-post and the "binnigale," which looks like a very squat diver; skylight rods and suchlike frankly bore me—it is so impossible to think of them as anything *but* brass rods—they are devoid of imagination!

We met our crew at the afternoon steamer, when M'Brayne duly deposited a mass of passengers and luggage, which slowly filtered through the turnstile, depositing coppers for the privilege. The Dhuiné-Wassail stalked through first, but the Don was held up for some moments, while he tried to pass through with his arms full of packages and simultaneously produce the necessary coin from his trousers pocket. Jack gazed with more attention at their luggage than at the owners of it. One of the things a boat does not have is a box-room, and although there is plenty of locker space for clothes, the one essential is that the receptacle that brings them should be collapsible.

The idea was to get off first thing the next morning, so we got all necessary provisions on board and proceeded to "settle-in" the new crew. In the main cabin I found the Don helplessly surveying all the small details of his toilet—razor, soap, hair-brush, strop, &c.—which had been ruthlessly emptied by Jack on to the seat. I keep all my own small possessions in bags, so I got one for him and hung it up on a

hook. His pyjamas I rescued from the rack sacred to charts, and his sea-boots from under the table.

Jack was very anxious to make a good impression with our first meal, so insisted upon helping me with its preparation. In honour of our ultra-Scottish company I had got a haggis sent to us. No one would suppose the Don was a Scot, but although his speech is of Oxford, his name is actually Stuart ; and even if the Dhuiné-Wassail's name is such a good Lowland one as Kennedy, he has all the attributes of a Highland chief : hence the haggis. Q.E.D.

We began with the local product, herring. I have no objection to this animal while eating it, but have every objection to dealing with its débris afterwards ; and as for cleansing the plates of the perilous stuff, I simply can't—so we ate it off grease-proof paper. One of the few conveniences of yachting from a house-keeping point of view is the simple way of disposing of all unwanted objects—out of the window, so to speak, and without even a " gardyloo." This course disposed of, Jack said he would serve the next, as I had it all ready on the stove. He retired into the fo'c'sle, and after a pause reappeared warm and triumphant, bearing the potatoes in their appointed dish—and the soup tureen. This being placed in front of

me, I uncovered it. O Tempora! O Mores! There was the haggis, but dished with all the water it had been boiled in! Fragrant memories of the fauna of our town canals overcame me, and I have felt rather Southern about haggis ever since. The body was recovered with difficulty and deposited on another dish, and those gifted male creatures actually ate it. Jack explained at some length how much good food is thrown away in cooking, and proceeded to a chemical analysis of the salts, &c., probably in solution in the canal-like water. Like Macaulay, Jack has sometimes "more information than society requires."

The first thing in the morning was to get up! Considering how often I have had to do this in life, it is amazing how bad I still am at it! But the others were worse! The hectic gibberings of the alarum-clock did not even disturb their dreams. Getting Jack up should have been the easiest, as he was at least within speaking distance, but failing in the attempt I just had to get up myself and wake the middle-cut. Guest-like civility made them obey, while Jack slept happily till roused to action by hearing one of the others settling down to a comfortable shave at his own pet glass in the lavatory, which he considers his dressing-room.

After breakfast we went over our day's plans

with the chart, and the West of Scotland sailing directions which are provided by a thoughtful Admiralty, and got the tides calculated. This is a necessary and most serious business. Jack curdled my blood with tales of seven-knot tides, rises and falls of I forget how many feet, overfalls, races, and whirlpools! It was with relief I gathered that but few of these terrors lurked in Lochfyne. Jack very clearly explained to us how to find high-tide at Ardrishaig, which was what we wanted to know, as we were going into the canal. The tome he used was very full of names of places where you could find high-tide on any day—all the places one didn't want, of course, and Ardrishaig was not one of them. It would be much simpler if one yachted exclusively from Glasgow to Liverpool and on by Southampton to London. At least it would be simpler to me. But naturally I did not expose these absurd views. I listened while they thought of a number, then doubled it, added 10 to it, then halved it, then—

"The answer is 11-19, isn't it?" This from me. My interruption was naturally ignored as irrelevant.

When I had finished washing up the dishes I found them on deck, where much stamping about and talking had announced that we were preparing to get under way.

Getting in the first few fathoms of chain is one of the preliminary bits of exercise, and the Don was slowly winding at the winch, while the others were getting the boom topped and the jib ready to go up. Winding a heavy chain on a small winch almost at one's feet is a back-aching business, and in an interval to straighten his curved spine, the Don said to me thoughtfully—

"It is a peculiar coincidence that high-water at Ardrishaig is in point of fact at the exact moment you chose haphazard in your facetious comment on our method of calculation. Very surprising, is it not?"

"Not so very," I replied. "You see, I read it in a local time-table I bought ashore. I shouldn't have mentioned it, because these simple little land ways of doing things seem to disappoint Jack; it is part of the game to pretend we are beyond the reach of human aid, so to speak, and, of course, I quite see it's much cleverer to do things by logarithms instead of a 'Murray's Time-table.'"

Further conversation was cut short by a shout from Jack that if we had nothing else to do but talk, we might come and haul on the throat halyard. My trouble in remembering which rope is which in the mass round the mast was only deepened by the different mnemonics each

of my enthusiastic instructors gave me. Then even when I had mastered which was which while the sail was down, I wouldn't recognise them when the sails were up! An ordinary rope had somehow become a wire one, and some which had held on only by their teeth—or at least by a large galvanised hook—had mysteriously grown longer. Fortunately for all concerned, my weight on a rope is not important enough to make it worth while persisting in my education, so I was told off to coil down those mysteriously elongated ones. Rope is another unexpected factor in the life of the newcomer to the sea. Not that its presence is unexpected—it is, of course, part of the *mise-en-scène*,—and to "coil down" some rope is just the sort of thing one feels confident to deal with from the beginning. Even the Mock Turtle could "faint in coils," and he was less suitably shaped for the purpose than rope. On land I had always found rope a harmless tractable thing. As the Market Reports might say, "Rope—quiet and without change." But its behaviour in its sea-going life would be described in the same language as "producing a bearish condition."

To know that a rope is called a sheet is the beginning of wisdom—a little longer and one realises why: it is a *nom de guerre*, and cloaks a perverseness of conduct little to be expected

of the household article. Jack hastened to make it clear to me that it is not a matter of demoniac possession when a rope will only coil in cat's paws and figures of eight, but that I am trying to coil it against the grain,—I had guessed as much from its behaviour.

"What you must remember is always to go with the sun."

"Just like the port after dinner?" I asked.

"No, not in the least like the port—that is mere custom,—this is because rope is laid that way—that is to say, some rope. You can have hawser-laid or cable-laid. . . ."

"Please! one at a time—which is this?"

"Oh, this is hawser-laid, practically all the ropes. . . ."

"Oh, hush thee, Jack, one step enough for me. I shall now treat all ropes as innocent, if superstitious hawser-laid, till they prove themselves guilty of being cable."

I found later that the only cable-laid rope was the hawser!

While I was employed in small jobs suitable to my low intelligence the others had done the heftier work, and we were now ready to start. After the warning cry from the winch that the anchor was "up and down"—meaning it was still down but anxious to come up—I was ordered to the helm. The shore seemed omin-

ously close, and the two other yachts near us multiplied themselves in my anxious eyes to a small fleet. Now or never was the moment to try the powers of auto-suggestion! "Every day and in every way I grow more and more nautical." The jib was broken out—we moved off in that silent mysterious way known only to ships under sail in a light wind and smooth water. We had to round a buoy at the entrance, and could hardly point high enough to do so. Jack was in the bows (as I knew he would be!), where he was making fast the anchor. He looked up and shouted—

"Luff."

I luffed.

"Luff"—crescendo.

I luffed more. Then as the buoy threatened to go under our bows—

"*Luff*, I tell you"—this time fortissimo.

I thought I had been luffing, but this last howl so shattered my self-confidence that I immediately bore-away. We got past, thanks to the Dhuiné-Wassail, who was near me at the main-sheet and hurled himself at the tiller. Our dignity rather than our paint suffered damage, for we sidled past like a cat going through a door unwillingly.

Jack worked off his irritation by putting up the stay-sail, and then came aft and asked me

almost solicitously if I did not quite understand the difference between luffing and bearing away. I could only explain that I knew it no better than I should my right hand from my left if he shouted loudly enough. I am afraid he thought I was being frivolous about serious things.

I was much exercised in my mind as to how we were going to get into the canal with motive force so uncontrollable as wind. I thought I might hazard a question or two to the gentle Don. He was steering as we got near Ardrishaig, so I sat beside him in the cockpit. Why the shallow well one sits in when steering should so be called, I don't know, unless it is that two people in it at once are liable to bicker, as the helmsman always thinks the other in his way and in crises says so.

" I say, Don, how does one get into a canal ? " I asked. " To sail into a lock sounds as difficult as to sail in at a front door and anchor in the lobby."

" I agree that either operation would be difficult with much sail, given that the lock and lobby were of the usual dimensions ; but with only the foresail up we shall have steerage-way and no more, and it will be comparable to entering the hall with one's umbrella up."

The Skipper meanwhile was evolving some

mysterious plaything in the bows. The D.W., looking bored and incredulous, was stuffing a child's football with corks—the only remains (except the bill) of about a year's beer consumption. I knew those corks well, for Jack had been collecting them with the same zeal, and I had imagined, the same futility as a gutter-snipe collects tramway tickets. Now their ultimate destiny was going to be revealed to me.

I looked for Jack, but he was measuring small rope with solemnity and concentration, counting to himself and using his arms and profile as a measure, in a way "both angular and flat." So I fell back upon the bored D.W.

"As Jack seems to be practising the heraldic attitude of 'yachtsman regardant,' and I should hate to put him off his game—he might become a yachtsman rampant or affrontée, or something unpleasant,—can you explain what you are both doing?"

"Well, I suppose you can 'me lacessit' with impunity, but beyond saying that the thing is called a tripping-buoy and is likely to be a nuisance, I really can't explain it very well."

"Ten," announced Jack at this moment, and in the same breath, "and it's not called a tripping-buoy—it's just a buoy-rope, and you will soon see the use of it when we anchor."

"Humph," was all the D.W. answered, or it

may have been a Gaelic remark, I'm not sure which.

" I hear we are going in under stay-sail," I said to Jack, feeling rather pleased with the yachting flavour of the remark.

Jack was fastening a last knot with his teeth, and I understood him to say—

" No, we'll walk in."

" Walk in ? " I gasped, surprised, but always open to explanation. Jack seemed equally surprised.

" Walk in ? How could we walk in ? I said warp in."

And as we were just about to anchor, there was no time for further enlightenment. After the sails were temporarily stowed, I found it meant what I should have called in my simplicity, being towed in, by a line to a man on the breakwater. For this you might imagine that we just got " a line " ready to throw ashore . . . the rest of us were also guilty of this superficial view of the occasion ; the White Knight knew better ! Every available rope on board seemed to be conscripted from its usual work, or dug out of the sail locker ! Coils and trails of it covered the deck, and at least half of them were heavier than any normal man could throw. I regretted pointing this out, for Sir Jack then ordered hand-lines to be added

to them to make the throwing easier. I dare say most of them found a job later getting through the locks—the very air seemed full of them then, beginning with the coir hawser (cable-laid !), which was attached at one end well up the mast, and at the other to a distant and indifferent horse. In a pause in the proceedings I remarked what a different view the horse would take of the business if he were trying to pull eighteen tons on dry land. " The loss of weight of a body in water, the difference of friction," &c., &c., became at once the subject of a learned discourse by my optimistic husband, whose missionary zeal to improve my mind never suffers even through habitual non-success. I can at least imitate Bernard Shaw's Anne and say to my Superman, " Do go on talking, dear."

The only unfortunate incident during the day had been when getting up the anchor at Ardrishaig. I didn't mention it before, because as a matter of fact nothing was said about it at the time. In anchoring with so much on our minds, no one remembered about " streaming the buoy," and the little object had vanished from our sight and memory. But when the anchor came up, the chain was found fancifully festooned with rope, and the poor little drowned buoy tethered to the anchor !

Getting a large boat through the locks with

a small crew is "sweetin' wark," as one of our helpers remarked. I think I had the worst of it, for the others were fully occupied with the checking-ropes, so I had first to steer her in to the locks, then rush round seeing that the fenders were protecting the precious paint, and at odd and always inconvenient moments give a tug or a kick to the dinghy, who clung to our stern or got left between the closing gates, like a small child in a crowd, who either hangs on to your skirts or gets lost behind.

A judicious onlooker who smoked peacefully while watching our fervid efforts, remarked between spits "that some folk have a queer idea of pleasure." I heartily concurred! As the French proverb says, *l'art d'ennuyer est de tout dire*, so I shall leave the fifteen locks of the canal without further comment, except a testimonial to the horse and man who towed us through with the efficiency and bored indifference of Permanent Officials.

At Crinan I got a letter from an old school friend asking if we could possibly find room for her sister-in-law for a few days, as she was visiting Scotland for the first time, and was a "keen yachtswoman, and would simply love to see something of your wonderful coast." I was rather aghast at the suggestion, for I knew absolutely nothing about this good lady—Miss

Dolly Keatley—and my friend gave no information, assuming, as correspondents so frequently do, that I knew all about her relatives. But after the first gasp of horror at thinking of a strange female in my cabin, I realised there were pros as well as cons. The housekeeping department could very well do with a little more help than it got from the untutored efforts of a male crew, and the said males—at least two-thirds of them—would enjoy the addition of a young unmarried woman. With this last admirably altruistic motive, I despatched a telegram to Miss Keatley, saying we would look for her at Oban in a couple of days. The Dhuiné-Wassail wanted me to add D.V. and W.P., but I refused. I am Scotch enough to be economical, and not Celtic enough to be superstitious. The D.W. always suffers from barely suppressed irritation when I pronounce Celtic with a C as sibilant as Seltzer ; on the other hand, he is no better pleased if I speak of the Keltic Kult !

At the door of the P.O. we met the Don, who had been sent ashore by Jack to telegraph to Greenwich for the probable weather. To the unsuspicious landsmen there was nothing wrong with the weather—nothing could have been lovelier than the view from Crinan over blue sea to the grey-blue hills of Scarpa and Jura and up north to the clear but distant hills of

Lochaber. But, of course, just looking at the weather is a very superficial way of judging. Jack had consulted at least three oracles—the barograph, the wet and dry bulb affair, and another. This other intrigues Jack tremendously, for he never quite fathomed the information about it, as it was in very technical German, and now its book of the words is lost. The thing itself has a particularly blank and unintelligent face, and all *I* know about it is that it is called a "Hygroskop," for that is printed on it; but Jack fills endless little note-books with "readings" from it, in the hope of finding a clue to its cryptic one-armed gesticulations. To-day evidently this thing must have done something unusual, and Jack was probably expecting a tornado or a monsoon or some such thing to ensue.

The Don's instructions were succinct and lucid enough: "Telegraph a shilling to Greenwich and ask for the weather in these parts for the next three days." Needless to say, the good lady who keeps the little shop—and incidentally the P.O.—had never heard of any similar transaction. "Telegraphing a shilling" presented physical impossibilities to her that we were powerless to explain away. The Don undertook to elucidate it, but she remained unconvinced, and after further efforts by the D.W. she was

completely puzzled. We got out the P.O. regulations, and tried to find information there that she would believe, but I began to think that the weather for the next three days would be over before we got any forrader! At last, despairing of either understanding us or getting rid of us, she called up Kilmartin on the telephone and asked for official enlightenment. Mercifully Kilmartin is apparently an up-to-date metropolis, for it gave her instructions to accept our shilling and send the telegram. I have often wondered if she ever understood how that shilling reached Greenwich. We got the answer next morning, and discovered from it that the hygroscop must have been trying to indicate: "Settled fine weather over a large area." I implored Jack to mark that down carefully in case it ever said it again.

III.

Once north of Crinan the question of tides has to be taken seriously, even by the most ignorant and frivolous. Only a few miles off is the dreaded Corryvreckan—as truly a whirlpool as Charybdis. After being corrected by the D.W. several times in my pronunciation of Corryvreckan, I even decided to call it Charybdis, as being easier and less contentious. The Dhuiné-Wassail can make an unintelligible, sing-song polysyllable out of the simplest Gaelic name—so Corryvreckan gave him great scope.

Our way lay through the Dorus Mhor—the Great Gate to the North. Although there was quite a good sailing breeze, we swept through on the north-going tide like a toy boat on a river, and far away we could hear Charybdis like a monster train in an endless tunnel. The D.W. and I steered most of the morning, while Jack instructed the unhappy Don in knotting and splicing. What the Don does not know he is humbly willing to be taught ; the D.W.

is otherwise constructed, and what he does not know is, in his opinion, not worth knowing. How much this is just defensive armour against Jack's attacks of information, I am not sure.

The sail to Oban was all too short, only four hours, and were I to describe the beauty of the blue and golden day I should become dithyrambic and tedious. The D.W. was both—in Gaelic, for he relieved his Celtic soul and tried to improve my mind with chants in what he said was the only language for such a land. Personally I don't believe a soul ashore would have understood him, but I grow more and more a cynic and a Sassenach the more Gaelic and sentimental the D.W. becomes.

Oban Bay, although the Mecca of west-coast yachting for big craft, is a most unsatisfactory place for the small fry. Jack demonstrated on the chart that it is difficult to find shallow enough water. To me it seemed there were plenty of places marked five fathoms which should do nicely, but it was explained that one must anchor with three times one's depth of chain, and that a simple calculation of fathoms into feet would show me *Skeletta* sitting precariously on the shore. As this view was endorsed by the other two, I felt it was not merely White Knightly anxiety.

It was finally decided to go into Oban and

"heave-to," while some one went ashore for letters, and then to go on to Dunstaffnage and anchor there for the night.

"Heaving-to" is an expression observing all the rules of a jargon specially designed to convey absolutely nothing to the uninitiated. I gathered it was a sailing-boat's way of marking time. This operation was the first I heard Jack admit *Skeletta* was not pre-eminently good at. To stand patiently in one spot with her sails so arranged that she can pay-off on neither tack seems to irk her, and she sheers about and manages to forge ahead even when tied up in this sort of automatic leash of sails. I was rejoiced to hear there was any way of making a sailing-ship stand still, so naturally asked why she was bad at this manœuvre. Jack was at once on the defensive.

"She is not bad at it at all. You can't expect a modern yacht with her short fore-foot to heave-to like a haystack or an old-fashioned straight-keeled boat. If she could do that, she wouldn't be able to go about as she does—practically turning on her heel and never missing stays."

I was delighted with this unexpected flight of fancy on Jack's part! It sounded so typically modern and athletic of *Skeletta* never even to notice the lack of stays, and I congratulated Jack on so neat a metaphor. It was most

dashing to have it explained away with the aid of a 'Seaman's Manual of Nautical Terms,' that it was merely another way of speaking of "going about," and that a picture of a ship "in stays" would show little difference from a ship "missing stays"—even at *Skeletta's* age! As the Don generally knows what I mean when I talk nonsense, it was to him I confided that I must have a "short fore-foot" too, for I'm not very good at heaving-to in conventional monotony, but am really rather good at the rapid and frequent tacking necessary in emergencies. The Don and his friends being mostly clever can afford to be frivolous—unfortunately so many of Jack's friends think they have to be solemn in order to be taken seriously.

Oban Bay is large enough even for *Skeletta's* impatient way of heaving-to, and the Don and I were cast off in the dinghy to get letters and fresh provisions. Jack's hardy mariner attitude to food is shared, though largely from indifference, by the D.W., but the Don and I prefer our bread undecorated with blue mould, and meat a little more succulent than "Libby billy-boof," our menu name for bully-beef.

We got round to Dunstaffnage in the late evening, and anchored close in under the old castle. It was a most romantic spot, and a wonderfully beautiful evening—in fact, an ideal

time and place for "cuddy" fishing, according to Jack, so off he went, taking the D.W. with him to row. The Don was not invited, nor did he volunteer,—alone with a fishing-rod he is merely inefficient, but in a small boat he would be a danger. He and I sat on deck and just talked—such a pleasant occupation, but one always rather reprehensible in the eye of our Skipper.

The next day was the one on which we had covenanted to meet our unknown guest. But instead of going back to Oban to do so, we telegraphed asking her to join at Dunstaffnage —a drive of only a few miles from Oban. From Jack's point of view, it saved wasting part of a day, and I thought we would make a better impression alone in a bay nicely proportioned to our size rather than among the leviathans in Oban. I did not know what being a "keen yachtswoman" might signify in Miss Keatley; but so many people share my own ignorance of what tonnage indicates, and if asked to pick out an 18-tonner would choose a boat of 80 or 90! The answer came back that Miss Keatley would arrive by the motor-boat which makes "an evening cruise" for Oban tourists. As hostess, I went with Jack in the dinghy to meet the new arrival.

Heralded by the asthmatic song of a gramo-

phone, the motor-boat arrived and emptied its contents ashore to explore the castle. Amongst the crowd of low-necked bobbed-haired flappers I wondered which could possibly be my cabin companion. It was not till they had all left the little pier with much joyous giggling and noise that we noticed one figure left behind standing guard over a large suit-case and hold-all.

Jack is no coward, and recovering his nerve, was the first to voice our awful thought : " That must be Miss Keatley." Instinct urged me to hide, to return swiftly to *Skeletta*, to sail away. But I mistook this beautiful womanly instinct for mere prejudice, and with misplaced virtue vanquished it ! I felt she *couldn't* be as awful as she looked ! No one who looked so like a French caricature of a British female tourist *could* be so perfect an imitation all through,—almost certainly she would turn out to be a thoroughly good sort and full of quiet humour. Jack says it is a mistake not to take people at their face value ; but he admits Miss K. is an exception—she should not be taken at all.

The fear that our shock must be apparent in our manner made me chatter with nervous loquacity, summarising our crew, our cruise—anything and everything. Miss Keatley sat silent in the dinghy, and peered through her glasses down her long nose at me. The only

remark she vouchsafed as we pulled up to *Skeletta* was—

"You are English, aren't you?"

"Oh dear, no," I answered. "My foot is on my native heath," and all that sort of thing, you know. "What made you think so?"

"You seem so vivacious," was the extinguishing reply.

I never realised how much I appreciated *Skeletta* till Miss Keatley came on board! Some civil show of admiration one had got used to, and Miss K. either remained in appraising silence or made comparisons unflattering to our self-esteem. Her experience of yachting appeared to have been a week on board a 40-ton ketch with a paid crew of four. To compare us and our ways to her was no doubt merely silly, and Jack so dismissed it; but I was less philosophical. I pretended to be amused, as it is so much more dignified than being annoyed, but it was a hard rôle to play! Her only conversation consisted of such remarks as—

"Do you have to sleep in the main cabin? On the *Maisie* there were three sleeping-cabins."

"Surely you have very little head room! On the *Maisie* one could stand up anywhere."

"How do you manage to wash properly in

that little basin? On the *Maisie* there was a bath under the floor."

I could not forbear pointing out that if bathing was what she was worrying about, we had a bath all round.

At dinner—or, to be more modest, at our evening meal—we made valiant efforts to carry off the situation according to our several abilities. Jack tried her on serious subjects, such as the relative advantages of ketch and cutter rigs, but her knowledge on the subject stopped short at the fact that the one had two masts and the other only one. The D.W. tried to find out what were her impressions of Scotland. She seemed to have none, except that the hotels were bad and expensive. Disagreeable opinions will do as well as others to pass the time, if they are put forward with any intelligence, but Miss Keatley confined herself to pronouncements and contradictions and offered no backing to either. She "unpacked" in the after-cabin while we washed up, and when she returned it was to say she always drank hot water at night and would like it now. With a show of polite alacrity, which was a mere veneer, I said I could light the stove again quite easily, and I was only sorry I had not known before using all the boiling water to wash up with.

"On the *Maisie* there was a hot-water tank

heated by the auxiliary engine," I was told. I replied that with us unfortunately we had to depend on auxiliary good temper.

When at last we got Miss K. to retire to bed, we fell almost literally into each other's arms! How were we to bear it? or better still, how were we to get rid of her? As we discussed the matter in tones hushed not to penetrate the bulkhead, the door opened and in came Miss K. garbed in a long yellow oilskin with the acting rank of a dressing-gown, and asked for a hot-water bottle!

I deplored our total deficiency in such articles, for I was sure that on the *Maisie* . . . The Don wisely interrupted with a suggestion that an empty whisky-bottle might do. Jack was understood to say there wasn't one—an undoubted lie, for he can never bear to throw them overboard,—and the Dhuiné-Wassail, with deep sarcasm in his tones, suggested it would do as well if she drank some of the contents. The Don's desire to snub Miss K. must have been as strong as his wish to save me trouble, for he volunteered to get the hot water himself, and it would need at least two strong motives to make him face a Primus alone! I was duly touched, but, *pro bono publico*, did it myself—not even for the relief of incinerating Miss K. was it worth burning to the water's edge.

That night she snored.

I spent the inevitable wakefulness trying to plan a really successful murder, but sadly came to the conclusion I had the heaviest disqualification—an obvious motive.

While I got breakfast—Miss K. having decided to row about in the dinghy—we had a council of war. Murder being ruled out, it was difficult to know what to do. Jack is too good-natured to be rude, and I, though better at it, was handicapped by being the hostess. As the Don, though erudite, is without guile, it remained for the Dhuiné-Wassail to find the solution. To abandon ship—was his suggestion. It sounded drastic, but when explained it meant that we must all get telegrams recalling us on business. This seemed a horrid waste of time, but he explained we needn't really go, but only pretend to till Miss K. had gone. The idea was voted good, but rather too wholesale. Two being recalled might pass for an unfortunate coincidence, three could only be a conspiracy. Business and the Bar being both professions with more unexpected incidents than professoring, it was agreed that Jack and the Dhuiné-Wassail should go. The Don looked a little uncomfortable about the arrangement, so I made haste to assure him that he would be allowed to go too—*pour les convenances !*—and he cheered up again.

As the post could not arrive in the casual unpremeditated way it does ashore, the D.W. said he would sail down to Connel Ferry in the dinghy and send a wire from there.

At breakfast Miss K. said she couldn't eat eggs, which was all we had, and wanted tea when there was only coffee, and again referred scathingly to our lack of washing convenience. My proposal to bathe was consequently received with approbation, at least by the crew.

Afterwards the Don came to me rather worried, and said his zeal had outrun his discretion, as, in point of fact, "I did not come prepared to enjoy the privilege of mixed bathing!" Jack had only one such preparation himself, but I had two, and I offered the Don one. I kept the red one for myself, as it seemed the more conspicuous, and gave the Don an elegant "creation" in pale-blue stripes with a white sash! I did not know whether to credit the fact that he accepted it to his lack of vanity or to an impersonal sense of humour. When we all arrived on deck ready for the plunge, I saw the Don had not tied his sash, but had it hanging down his back like a modern fish-tail train. Miss K. was gazing at him with such solemn disapprobation, that before I could tell him he dived off to take shelter from her gaze

in the water. We three followed, and it was only when we came up that Miss K. said she could not possibly bathe without a life-buoy, as she might get cramp. I don't suppose the large round object which *Skeletta* carries with her name painted on it has ever had occasion to do more than *look* like a life-buoy, and in my wicked heart I hoped she and it might have cramp together. In the meantime the wet and shivery Jack had to stand about in the wind that inevitably blows when one bathes, making the buoy fast to a rope and helping Miss K. down into it. To her keenness on boating she might add bathing—for she does both equally well: she couldn't sail and she couldn't swim. And to think I had designed her to be a nice young companion for my bachelors! I turned to relieve my mind to the Don, who was swimming on his back alongside. Suddenly he crumpled up, clasped his hands to his middle, and with an agonised look disappeared under the water! I am the most mediocre of swimmers, and diving under the *Skeletta*, let alone saving drowning men, is quite beyond me, so I shrieked to Jack and the D.W. for help.

"Quick! quick! the Don's got cramp or something awful!"

With an answering shout the two men hydroplaned to the spot, while I paddled helplessly

around looking for a sign of the blue bathing-gown.

"He must have got under *Skeletta*—dive!"

They both plunged down at the place I had last seen him, while in a passion of anxiety I realised how awful it would be if the dear little Don were drowned. I swam to the accommodation-ladder and climbed up, nervousness making me perform that painful feat even worse than usual, skinning myself in addition to the usual bruises. As soon as I reached the deck, what should I see but the pale-blue Don climbing on board from the opposite side! Fear suddenly turned to relief—and relief took its not unusual form of extreme annoyance!

"Good Lord! What have you been doing? You pretended to be drowning, and now I expect the others will be drowned looking for you. Where in the name of goodness have you been?"

As the little man was still looking very uncomfortable and still clutching his middle, I managed to subdue my relief and asked him if he were ill.

"No—no—not at all. I . . . Well, the fact is I thought I had overlooked some essential fastening in this unaccustomed though no doubt charming garment, for I suddenly became aware of what seemed to be some part of my costume

detaching itself, and in the circumstances I thought it best to reach the yacht as unostentatiously as possible. I am indeed apologetic if I caused you any anxiety."

As he stood dripping and explaining, the would-be rescuers came puffing and blowing to the surface, about to announce the pitiful fact that the body could not be found. On seeing the Don, they too expressed their possibly relieved but certainly injured feelings, and the disgruntled little Don scuttled away for'ard to divest himself of the now loathed "creation," trailing behind him the cause of his misfortunes—the long unfastened sash!

IV.

All these proceedings brought us to quite a late hour of the morning—not far from eleven o'clock, but had afforded us temporary respite from Miss K., for we had forgotten all about both her and the buoy, and I only remembered when I found her in a very bad temper, soaking the carpet of our cabin with her bathing things, not having *nous* enough to lift it. I should here put it to the credit side of yachts as against houses, that water overflowing on the floors finds its way inoffensively to the bilge, where it remains peacefully to be dealt with at leisure by the pump, instead of percolating through the ceiling below, and requiring first-aid from a plumber and plasterer.

"The Pump, its Use and Abuse," could occupy a chapter by itself—the Abuse contributed by me! It is one of those subjects one turns Jack on to, and then doesn't listen. Pumps there are for everything! From the ship's own particular pump to the little delicately

adjusted and easily mislaid pumps belonging to the stoves and lamps.

The D.W. had thought to get off by himself, and was rigging the dinghy's sail to that purpose ; but just as he was starting, our Miss Keatley thought she would go too ! The D.W.'s consent was civil in form only, and while the pachydermatous one was arraying herself, he told Jack to jolly well come along too, or he wouldn't go himself. Feeling our deliverance at stake, the Don and I piously urged Jack to his duty, and he went. The Don and I spent a charming inconsequent day, unannoyed by Dolly (what relative of saturnine humour called her that ?) and uninstructed by the skipper. I know that without Jack we would not manage at all, but if cruising produced *all* the emergencies that his deep forethought provides for, " who would sell a farm and go to sea ? "

About supper-time we saw the little argosy reappearing, dashing gallantly into the considerable jabble, her bows disappearing every few minutes in a shower of spray. We expected to find our menkind radiant with the expectation of deliverance, but it was a very subdued boat's crew that came alongside, and in silence their passenger stalked on board. She was clad in her yellow oilskin, looking like a jaundiced Mrs Noah, and as she stalked she dripped and oozed

and squelched, leaving a trail of water on the deck!

I could not face her without knowing the 'orrible details, so we four withdrew silently to the fo'c'sle, and the Dhuiné-Wassail took up the tale.

"Going to Connel things went well enough. It was pretty well a dead run, so our lady passenger could sit almost undisturbed. She told us at some length of various beautiful places she had seen in Norway, and of the delightful sails she had in the *Maisie*, and somehow contrived to make us feel that Scotland was ugly and *Skeletta* useless! Her pleasure in her recital was, I think, a little lessened by Jack's remarks, whenever he contrived to get one in—they were all dark and cryptic pronouncements on the particular kind of fools who sail open boats with booms and risk gybes as I was doing. You see, I was trying to hurry matters a bit by booming out the sail with the boat-hook, and the good lady who does not really know a gybe from a jib, and does not like to ask, was feeling vaguely uneasy. To do Jack justice as a host, I must say I don't think he realised this. I did, and piled on the agony by telling lurid tales of broken masts that brained the only passengers in their falls, and of upset dinghys where the sail had entangled

every one in the water, or the main-sheet that strangled the man in the stern as it leaped across !—and, in fact, that any or all these things might happen with ease when sailing before the wind with any but a thoroughly reliable man at the helm ; but, of course, she need not be in the least nervous with us. Jack inevitably quoted his pet maxim that 'them that knows naught fears naught,' but the pessimistic old bloke who first said that can't have met the Miss Keatley type."

"No, and if he had," interrupted the Don, "it would probably not have occurred to him to say '*omne ignotum pro terrifico*,' though it would have been as true as his more vernacular remark."

"We had to land well this side of Connel Bridge," went on the narrator, "so as not to be carried over the Falls, for the tide was running fast. The sight of the sea suddenly become a cataract was more interesting to Miss K. than reassuring, for she began making inquiries about possibly walking back ; but when she heard how far it was, she decided to risk the boat, and Jack reassured her about gybes, as it would be a beat back, and he added that *he* would steer ! I wonder which of us she dislikes the more now—the man who made her nervous, but kept her dry and left her

undisturbed, or the one who both chivied her from side to side and soaked her ! " I began to feel sorry for Miss Keatley. I know well what a late return in the dinghy can mean. It is very jolly just at first, beating to windward and calculating what one can make on the tack, and the occasional dash of spray is just amusing, and the perpetual rearranging of the human ballast prevents monotony, like making small children change places in class ! But as it grows darker and colder the excitement and amusement seem to go down with the sun, and to the crew the main-sheet seems to multiply its coils and to the helmsman the others seem to multiply their feet, and if sitting wet is uncomfortable, having to move when wet is infinitely worse, for the water trickles to a new spot at each movement, and the seats grow harder and harder.

" You know," continued the D.W., " one can't go on being formal and instructive when sitting jumbled up at the bottom of the dinghy and climbing over Jack's and each other's legs, and I tried a song or two ; but the way she stared at me made me feel she was thinking of the innocent glass of beer the Skipper and I had at the hotel under her tee-totally disapproving eye."

" Did you sing to her in Gaelic ? " I asked.

"Oh dear, no; I sang the Englishest thing I could think of—'O mistress mine, where are you roaming?'"

Jack here made his only contribution to the story. "I fancy she thought it a pretty rash assertion on your part that you could sing either high or low; anyhow, when you took to bellowing, 'Ich grolle nicht,' she asked me what it meant. I said it means 'I can't sing,' and she seemed to find the name appropriate."

Really, Jack is very tactless. He cannot see that the Dhuiné-Wassail takes his voice very seriously, and I don't think one could expect him to keep up both Gaelic and a sense of humour.

Ignoring Jack's interruption, I asked, "What about the telegram anyhow? Did you send it?"

There was a slight pause, and then Jack explained that, "No—we didn't after all. You see, it really would hardly do, you know," and so on. I might have known it! Had I but been there to "pour my spirits in thine ear, and chastise with the valour of my tongue!" Yet I don't know. I doubt if even Lady Macbeth could have persuaded a man who had once decided that "it's not done, you know!"

It did not require a very long argument to convince me that Miss Keatley's departure must be left on the knees of the gods, and even

if the expedition had disgruntled without removing her, we were at least some bread, butter, and eggs to the good.

"Well," I said, "I suppose there's nothing to be done now but take her a hot drink and condolences," and I went through to the cabin *en route* for Miss K.

Our "keen yachtswoman" was already there clothed and in her self-righteous mind. As I began to stammer condolences, she cut me short with the announcement that she had packed her things, and proposed leaving by the motor-boat as she had come.

"*Skeletta* is a very nice boat, no doubt, for young people who like playing at this sort of thing, but I had expected something more like the *Maisie*, and I hardly think that a prolonged cruise would suit me. Indeed, I am not very sure that I would suit you any better! When we were at Connel I sent a telegram to the hotel at Oban where I left my luggage that I would return to-morrow. You will, I hope, forgive me doing this without consulting you, but it seemed wise to take the opportunity of being actually at a post-office, and I was sure you would quite agree."

Here was a reversal of our nefarious—though fortunately abandoned—plan! I should perhaps have felt only relief—instead I was overcome

with remorse, and horrible misgivings that my dislike had been apparent in spite of efforts to suppress it. The others no doubt really had succeeded in hiding their feelings, but between women there is in those matters a sort of wireless over which one has no control: much less peaceful than the more telephonic communications we have with men, which are satisfactory enough in spite of occasional indistinct messages and "wrong numbers," and "no answers"—at least it leaves one some privacy! The regrets I stammered were almost sincere, but next day when she had really gone the relief was completely so. No; there is no room on an 18-tonner for polite toleration!

Thus departed Miss Keatley—unwept, unhonoured, but, as this chronicle proves, not quite unsung!

V.

We spent a happy evening planning how best to make up the time wasted on Miss Keatley. Out came the charts—for every kind of place and of every size. A uniformity of scale would be very soothing to the beginner. After tracing imaginary courses up the West Coast on the general charts, on which an inch may represent about ten miles, I find it difficult to readjust my mind to a chart of the final anchorage, where an inch may mean only one-tenth of a mile! The exclusive attention given to the matter in hand by the nautical mind is very clearly shown in the way charts are made. A map at least paints in the sea in a pleasing peaceful blue—offering no information about it, but at least admitting its existence. A chart, on the other hand, acknowledges the land only as a boundary-line to the sea, and leaves the rest as blankly unexplored as a map by Vasco da Gama. This entirely represents Jack's view of sailing—to him the land is just

a series of sign-posts to be identified by the sailing directions; and the highest praise he can bestow on a fellow-yachtsman is that "he's not always gazing about and admiring the scenery." It is not, of course, possible in six weeks to sail from the Isle of Man to St Kilda and visit every loch from the Solway to Cape Wrath, but we have all the charts necessary to do so, just in case.

One can travel on maps and charts with such illusive ease; all difficulties cease to exist, and the names themselves are a magnet to draw one on. The Summer Isles seemed to me so obviously a bourne to be made! Jack snorted at the idea of sailing there in a day.

"If a boat at the best does $6\frac{1}{2}$ knots and the distance is some 200 miles, and one has to allow for at least some hours against the tide, how long do you suppose it would take us?"

The question was a purely rhetorical one on Jack's part, for there is never any use asking me questions in mental arithmetic, and the pure mathematics the Don professes are so cleansed of earthly dross as to be quite useless for even simple mundane calculations.

The Barometer & Co. all taking optimistic views of the weather, it was decided to make an early start—say 6.30—and have breakfast under way, and with any luck and the present

S.W. wind holding, we should make Arisaig or Mallaig quite easily. Getting off in the early morning is a splendid feeling—even when the others are all up too, and so one can't feel more virtuous than one's neighbour! Once well under way, and making towards Lismore, I began to think of getting breakfast, but was too happy steering. Just then we opened out the entrance to Oban Bay, and the wind caught us suddenly, heeling us over till the water hissed along the lee-gunwale. At the same moment came a crash from below, followed by an avalanche of little crashes and bumps—each one enough to turn a housewife's heart to water.

"Good Lord," growled Jack, "did *no*body stow below?"

Of course nobody was me; and alas! nobody hadn't! The unwonted start had kept me playing about on deck, thinking what a "keen yachtswoman" I was becoming, while the one job truly mine, I forgot all about. The admirable lady who "remained mistress of herself though china fell" had not also the conviction of personal guilt to sustain. As the D.W. took the tiller from me that I might assist Jack at the post-mortem below, he murmured—

"If we can't do the things we can do, how can we do the things we can't do?" Rude, but apposite.

"Stowing below" is more of an art than the landsman might believe. Nothing can be treated as an inanimate object. They must one and all be lashed or jammed or caged in such a manner that their partiality for acrobatics cannot be indulged in. The drawers all had keys once upon a time, but a series of layings-up had inevitably wandered them, and so as even they love to fly out and hurl themselves on to the floor, they are made fast with lashings. A "lashing" differs from an ordinary piece of string by owning a head and a tail instead of a mere beginning and an end. Jack had spent many winter evenings putting these beautiful little Turks' heads on them, and finishing them off with elaborate, neat, little points. These elegant things are tied with slip-knots, so as to be quickly undone—and thereby hangs a tale!

Much later in the day—after we had rounded Ardnamurchan and were bowling along towards Eigg—Jack sent the Don to fetch the small pair of parallel rulers, always remembering to give the correct local colour in the directions—

"I think they're in the lower after-starboard locker."

The Don, with much alacrity and woolly-mindedness, and ignoring the precise directions, proceeded to ransack all the lockers—fore as

well as aft, port as well as starboard, cutting, with an air of business-like dexterity, every lashing that impeded him! The bitter comments made later by the maker of the lashings were all the harder for the Don to bear, in that he had failed to find the rulers in the end, as they were lying on the table all the time, and also by the fact that he so seldom has a knife at the only moments when he ought to use it!

Passing those little but wonderfully lordly islands of Rum and Eigg and Muck, I really hoped the Dhuiné-Wassail would let himself go in the matter of Gaelic pronunciation; for they Canna' be meant to sound like that. I deviated into this feeble joke quite unintentionally, but it hurt the D.W.'s feelings, and he refused all further blandishments on my part to make him give me the Highland names. Jack said the best strawberries he had ever eaten came from the Laird of Canna's garden, which made it seem almost worth going there, but the S.W. wind was not to be wasted lightly, and we ran on to Mallaig.

Mallaig can be summed up as herring-guts and sea-gulls, so as it was only about 3 o'clock we decided to do the Oban stunt again, going ashore only for food and letters. Being the terminus to the West Highland Railway, Mallaig

is important enough to have a P.O. which is distinct from a shop. I walked in and asked innocently—

"Have you any letters or parcels for *Skeletta?*"

"Ay, we have that," came the response in ominous tones. "We were just wonderin' when you'd be comin'."

I looked anxiously to see if I were in the police office by mistake, for my conscience-stricken thoughts flew to Miss Keatley, and I wondered for one horrible moment if she were accusing us of attempted murder!

In the meantime the saturnine official had disappeared into some back premises, and now returned, carrying at arm's-length a parcel which had once been a canvas bag, and was now a decaying mass too noisome to describe. With due precaution I looked at the label, and the truth was revealed to me: it was a parcel of ducks and chickens I had ordered from Ireland to meet us at Ardrishaig, and it had followed us ever since!

"Oh, thang you," I gasped, with my nose buried in my handkerchief; "I don'd wand this barcel."

"You've got to have it," said the inexorable official. "*We* don't want it either. You can be glad you're not fined for its destroying His Majesty's mails."

But his heart was softer than his speech, for he found a bit of stick to shove through the string and so let me carry it without contamination. Jack met me at the dinghy, and I showed him the putrid affair before dropping it into the sea, but Jack wouldn't hear of throwing it away! Had Miss K. been still on board, I should have suspected him of meditating some deed of darkness, but, *au contraire*, he meant it for ourselves.

"It will be quite all right if you wash them with a little permanganate of soda. You eat high grouse, why not high chicken?"

I meekly replied that I don't eat high grouse, and, anyhow, nothing but corrosive sublimate would disinfect these objects; and as for being hardy salts and all that kind of thing, even the Ancient Mariner didn't enjoy his albatross when it got too high. We agreed to leave it to the crew to decide. The jury—I mean the crew—viewed the corpses, and then we buried them at sea.

We debated whether to go up Loch Nevis or into Isle Oronsay. I voted for the latter, because I couldn't see into it as well as into the opener Loch Nevis, and felt the curiosity of a cat over a half-opened cupboard. The D.W. thought nothing could be better than Loch Nevis, as he said it meant heaven in Gaelic;

but the idea of a Gaelic heaven left me cold, so Isle Oronsay it was.

Once round the corner of the lighthouse one sees the whole bay, which is as much a loch as many so called, and the lighthouse is on the isle that gives it name and protection. There was a small yawl lying well inside, and we anchored close to her.

As lunch, when one is sailing, is a cold and sketchy meal, I made haste to get a decent hot supper ready. While I was doing so, the owner of the yawl came alongside and hailed us. He introduced himself, and said he had come to ask for help.

"My one and only crew had to leave at Mallaig, and I picked up a new man there this afternoon. I am not very good at supporting life unaided, being merely an artist. You all look so awfully capable (the Don bowed modestly) that I thought you would take pity on a weak brother. Kenneth—the new man—was engaged chiefly to feed me, for I do know something about sailing, but nothing about cooking, and I thought I'd made that clear. We managed well enough with boiled eggs for supper, but when I handed him the bacon for breakfast, he just looked at it sadly, and intoned in his charming Highland way, 'But Kenneth hass no knowledge of the cooooking.' So frank an

avowal means, I suppose, that he never understood a word I said when I engaged him ; but here we are, no more eggs, and only bacon, which seems destined to remain raw ! Please give me advice, or lend me an egg ! "

Jack said at once that he could have plenty of either, but that a Gaelic interpreter was really what was wanted, and we had the very article on board. (It was now the D.W.'s turn to bow with unbecoming smugness.) Before he could do more, the devil prompted me to say that I knew quite enough Gaelic to order breakfast, and would be delighted to interpret. Jack looked delighted, if surprised.

" By Jove ! I didn't know you spoke Gaelic ! "

The D.W. was obviously incredulous, and the Don a little nervous.

" Rather ! It's quite easy ; you just say to him, ' C-h-ook a rasher dhu,' " and I bolted below before meeting the D.W.'s wrathful glance !

Our artist neighbour came on board after our meal was over and examined our ship, and invited us aboard his in the morning. He said he was unique amongst landscape painters, inasmuch as he had been painting the West Coast for years and had never visited Iona. He received our chorus of heartfelt thanks.

I wish people who lived in stationary homes

were as hospitable as those afloat. How much more interesting it would be to be able to call on any total stranger and by saying "What a jolly little cottage you've got," or "That's 'some' castle you're in," be received with welcoming drinks and an offer to view the entire establishment.

Next day the wind had fallen away almost completely, and everything was shrouded in drizzling mist. But as it is seldom the expected that happens, there was no reason for not starting. If we got some wind all would be well, as the tide at Kyle Rhea suited till about 2 o'clock. If no wind came, we could always anchor at Glenelg.

We drifted out past the lighthouse, with no sign of wind on the water, but there evidently was some overhead, for our big topsail caught enough to send us along, although almost imperceptibly. This topsail was our "jackyarder," which I take to be a sort of pet name for this stately but not easily managed sail; the little one is called "jibheaded," which always sounds to me a term of abuse, in spite of Jack's painstaking explanations. Going as slowly as we were doing, the log would have been useless, except as a deep-sea fishing-line, so Jack spent a busy morning taking our speed—or the lack of it—with an arrangement really far more

after his own heart. Having stationed himself at the bows with the contents of the waste-paper basket and a stop-watch, he got the Don precariously perched on a spot on the end of the counter. With an incisive "Now" like a starting-pistol, Jack dropped one of the bits of paper overboard; the Don less incisively said "N-n-now" as the thing passed him; Jack clicked the stop-watch and then soliloquised in feet and seconds, and triumphantly asserted that our progress was 1.53 or 1.49, or some such number of miles per hour. This took, as I said, most of the morning, for Jack and the Don were involved in argument after each effort as to whether the latter had said "Now" too soon or too late. I thought it might be less contentious if the Don did the dropping in, but unfortunately he pressed the wrong bit of the stop-watch, whose moving finger having writ, flew back and cancelled all of it!

The tide at Kyle Rhea, the watery corridor which just divides Skye from the mainland, was the second big tide I had seen in being. Except at slack water it is no use attempting it. Even going with it is neither safe nor pleasant, as it runs like a river in spate and deprives one of steering power. It would be truer to say it carries one like a river, for it does not seem to run at all, but only to boil up from

below in a thousand places, the waves from each crater dashing into the others, and forming a surface of extraordinary agitation and menace. Slack water between tides means that Kyle Rhea is off the boil, but even then simmering, and it was at this state that we got through it, tacking from side to side against a fair breeze. Jack called it a foul breeze, so evidently it is not in witchcraft only that "fair is foul."

We anchored just inside Loch Duich, as the fair-foul breeze was not suitable for further effort. Jack immediately set to work to look for flounders, armed with a trident worthy of Britannia. He looked quite *un*like Britannia as he hung over the side of the dinghy, aiming at half-seen "flukies," and much more like a child at a Hallowe'en party spearing for apples with a fork. Like all fishers he got plenty of "nearly-caughts," and I suppose equivalent amusement. Fortunately we were not depending on a fish-supper.

Late in the evening a large yacht, lit up "like a grand hotel," steamed slowly past, and anchored with an imposing rattle of chain outside us. The rest of us were more or less comatose in the warm cabin, as we usually are after the day's open air, but Jack was up and about at once, like the household terrier, doing watch-dog.

"By Jove, she's the *Thisbe*, I believe." No response went up from below to this interesting announcement.

"And who may she be?" some one asked.

"Why, the Boileau-Goldies' boat, of course, from the Clyde."

I became almost animated. I dislike the B.G.'s quite whole-heartedly, but as Jack was at school or college or something with the man, I try to dissemble, like a really sweet woman; but it was hard to do it effectively, as I knew it meant a call on them next day and a frantic tidy-up for their return visit.

Events did not move quite according to plan. *Thisbe's* breakfast was no doubt more elaborate than ours; but as they had many hired menials to wash up, the affair as a whole was over before ours, and while dishes and débris still littered our fo'c'sle, and the cabins were still untidied and the Don still shaving, we saw their gig put off and make to come alongside us. It was almost like the Almighty visiting the black beetle, as Kipling suggests in another connection. The gig was not much shorter than *Skeletta's* entire length, and was rowed by four men of a crew, and in the stern presided two imposing figures, male and female, with the blue ensign floating behind them almost to the water. We may, and generally do, fly a blue

ensign too, but of course this particular morning it was not up! I rushed around in the demented way of dreams—tidying up by the simple process of shoving everything out of sight. I banged on the door where the Don was shaving, and adjured him so peremptorily to hurry up that he merely answered "Damn," and spilled his shaving-water into the bilge. Jack and the D.W. were meantime receiving the visitors at the front door—I mean the accommodation-ladder—and I swear I could feel *Skeletta's* 18 tons stagger to starboard as so much plump prosperity stepped on board!

"What a dear little boat!" was the inevitable opening remark from Mrs Boileau-Goldie.

It was surprising how contradictory I felt. A short time ago I thought the same myself; but living on board changes one's sense of proportion, and *Skeletta* no longer seemed at all little—emphatically not "dear little" in either the patronising or protecting sense.

With difficulty and giggles Mrs B.G. got below, and was inserted into the cabin.

"What a sweet little cabin!" but the enthusiastic tone was accompanied by a searching and mystified glance, which, interpreting, I answered—

"No, we don't all sleep here; there is another sweet little cabin."

"Oh yes, of course; and here it is, I suppose," making for the fo'c'sle.

"No, that's the kitchen; would you like to come in and see how the toilers of the sea cook?"

"Oh yes! How delightful!" But she didn't come in. She merely looked in. "And you do the work yourselves? What fun you must have!"

"Yes," I agreed. "Fortunately doing all our own work is a luxury not beyond our means."

Why will people always say "what fun" or "how jolly" when they hear we have no crew? It has its advantages no doubt, but cooking and washing up don't seem to me among them. On land, if one admits one is temporarily without servants, condolences the most sincere are showered upon one. Yet the advantages of gas, hot water, and unlimited head-room are mitigations not to be despised. Personally I have decided to consider all that part of the life as the price to be paid for the other. I even think it's a cheap one—for a fine sail is a joy beyond valuation. Still the price paid for anything is never exactly the part one considers "fun."

The entrance to the after-cabin much intrigued our visitors, and confirmed them in

their view of us as a miniature working model for a yacht. We have no room for a door as well as the companion-ladder, so the two are combined into one, ladder and door being, like Siamese twins, fixed back to back. It has the mild disadvantage that if the door as a door is left open, the ladder cannot be used; but, as I explained to the B.G.'s, that is no worse than occasionally having to wait for the lift in the *Thisbe*.

As our guests got into their state barge to depart, they insisted on our promising to come to them for an early lunch before leaving. I trod on Jack's foot and frowned at the amiable Don, and said I was afraid we couldn't, as we must get off; but, alas! the D.W. had already given away the fact that we had to fill up with water, and did not mean to start till later.

As the crew's four oars smacked the water with naval precision and the gig shot away, Mrs B.G. called out—

"We have a friend of yours on board who is very anxious to see you."

Naturally I shouted back—

"Who is it?"

"Miss Warden," was the reply.

"Bridget Warden!" I cried joyously. "She's the very person for us! Why didn't I think of her before! Let us deliver her from her bondage

to these luxurious Philistines, and take her to see real sea with us."

There was a look of dark disapproval on the faces of the crew, and as I enlarged on the pleasures of Bridget's society, it broke out into open mutiny. No more strange females was their cry. Even the departed Dolly might be a bitter sort of amusement as one amongst a crowd in an 800-ton palace like *Thisbe*, but *Skeletta* was too small for such experiments! So embittered had they become, that the fact that this was not a "strange female" but my own friend had quite escaped them. Man-like, they were more reassured by Jack's tepid approval—"Oh yes, she's all right"—than by my warmest praises.

We found Bridget's visit to the B.G.'s was within a day or two of finishing anyhow, and with tact stretched almost to insistence we got her transferred to us. Linen dresses, white shoes, and evening frocks not being really necessary on our ship, the amiable Thisbeans agreed to house the superfluous luggage and take it back to the Clyde. I thought I had enough sweaters, cardigans, and leather jackets to make good deficiencies.

My new cabin companion certainly kept me awake too—not with snores, but with that delightful meandering conversation which is begun

and punctuated with "Do you remembers?" We were "finished" together in Paris, and had met very little since, so the absurd little incidents of that time still formed our chief ground in common.

We meant to get off early, and as bathing rather retards breakfast preparations, I had said we would not appear, and the men could have a plunge unencumbered with society or anything else. When we woke it was to find something quite special in fine days, and we both regretted our bathless decision. The looking-glass at the end of our cabin is at an angle to reflect the small amount of deck seen when the skylights are open, a view extensive in length, but only about six inches high. We had just decided to have a bathe when the men were finished, when, in the glass, I saw a pair of ankles near the side, then a pair of wrists, and I deduced in a manner worthy of Holmes that the owner was not walking on all-fours, but was pulling up the bathing-ladder. I called out—

"What ho! on deck there! Don't pull up the ladder; we're going to bathe after all."

At breakfast the Don, with his air of propounding some abstruse philosophy, began—

"Curiously enough, just when one of you ladies called out not to bring in the bathing-ladder, I was in the very act of doing so."

"Why, yes," answered Bridget casually. "We saw you."

There was a pause. Then, with unusual simplicity of speech, the Don exclaimed, "God!" and that was all. I never heard one word tell so long a story! All his misunderstanding of how we had seen him and his emotions at being seen, much complicated by Bridget's cool announcement of it, were all contained in that emphatic monosyllable. It was too good to spoil, so we refrained from the bathos of explanation.

VI.

SAILING logs make the dullest reading imaginable, although they set forth a strictly correct account of events, which may in themselves have been full of life and romance, danger and heroism. It goes to prove how small a part mere facts have in the presenting of truth. These sententious opinions were given out by me, swept aside by Jack, and argued by the others after I had read aloud the official entry of our journey in *Skeletta's* log. "Wind W.S.W., moderate at first, freshening later. Started at 8 A.M. with full lower sail. Off Gareloch lowered staysail and took in one reef. Considerable sea in North Minch. Hove-to and took dinghy on board. Passed Summer Isles in downpour of rain. Anchored Ullapool 10 P.M. Wind still blowing hard from same quarter." A passage from Bradshaw, including his footnotes from "A" to "Z," would give more impression of adventure! Jack was understood to murmur that

any journey extracted from that scientific work by me would probably *be* full of adventure.

Our sail was worthy of some more stirring form of chronicle. Sailing can show in a day more aspects of life than one can see on shore in a little lifetime of ordinary occupations. Real physical hard work, sheer pulling and hauling, till you sweat and ache ; long periods of comparative inaction, when you can glory in the rush and plunge and excitement of motion and the beauty of the sea, or the sails against the sky ; then comes some emergency that needs skill and nerve to meet it, or the quick well-timed management of the jib-sheets as she goes about in a quiet moment between waves, and on the skill of the helmsman depends whether you get merely wet or thoroughly soaked in the process !

I greatly admired Bridget's attitude of mind, for she does not know much about sailing, and might very pardonably have felt nervous with the deck at an angle of a house-roof, the water flying over the bows and gurgling in the scuppers, and the orders howled aloud and sped on their way with adjurations of an ultramarine colour. I did not know much more about the art myself, but I can steer, and, what was more important, I did know Jack ; and when it comes actually

to doing something instead of preparing to do something we probably won't do, the White Knight is without fear, if not quite without reproaches! After the dinghy was stowed on deck the manœuvring space was considerably restricted. Bridget remained in the cockpit at Jack's imperative orders, for he had once seen her try to go below, making her way by the lee-side of the deck, which is a most lubberly thing to do, and Jack had no mind to have to try and pick her up when she went over! The D.W. sat on the skylight as near Bridget as he could, in the intervals of working the jib-sheets with the Don. He seemed to think Bridget's spirits needed cheering up, and that he would distract her thoughts from what must appear to her our watery perils. He sang Gaelic laments which were as cheering as funeral keenings. Fortunately most of it blew past us unheard. I was steering, so did not feel called upon for conversation. Anyhow, it was not I who was being serenaded, but I kicked Bridget and indicated she might do something about it. Poetry, even in English, is not Bridget's failing, but she did her best.

"Is that the one about the 'Emus are wailing'?" she asked.

With tender compassion the D.W. said it

was not, and offered at once to sing, "Turn Ye to Me." Jack tactlessly interrupted—

"Surely you mean sea-mews? You only get Emus in Australia."

"Then I expect they do wail," I said; "and it probably has something to do with the Burgundy."

Jack was not required to throw cold water on this idea, as we got it literally down our backs at that moment.

"That is the worst of women in a boat: they will talk instead of watching what they're doing," spluttered Jack, as he tried to get the salt estranging sea to run up his neck again.

The Don was below meanwhile, trying to puzzle out our exact position in case the Skipper should suddenly demand it of him. It was not an easy job for any one, as most of the Ben This and Ben Others which we were supposed "to see in line," or "keep open," or "just closed," were entirely invisible in the mist. It was even more difficult for the Don, who seems to have less control of inanimate objects than other people. For him a swinging table refused to present a horizontal plane, and the chart-weights drop off it on to his toes, and the chart itself rolls up as with a spring. I have a great belief in food for the temper, and as cooking was an impossibility, I called out to the Don

to get some chocolate and biscuits for every one out of the port locker. As Jack said afterwards, " any idiot " would have remembered we were on the port tack, and left the port locker alone. I thought it best not to inquire whether " any idiot " would have known not to send the order, or " any idiot " not to have carried it out. Anyhow, the Don did carry it out, and the moment he opened the door was met and overpowered by a flight of groceries, and the cabin was littered with jam and chutney, salt and pepper, an open tin of sardines, some baking-powder, and most horrible of all, a broken bottle of preserved sand-eels, which the White Knight was treasuring " in case "—well, in case we met Tarpon or some such beasts, I expect. When I stood stricken before the mess, I found their horrid, pallid, flabby bodies sprinkled with mustard or sticky with jam, polluting the very sofa cushions !

The opening of Pandora's Box may have had more far-reaching results, but it can't have made such a mess locally. With us also the offending opener had managed to shut at least one essential thing inside ; thank Heaven, there was later found to be a sense of humour, as well as the heavier cereals !

The Summer Isles were less alluring than their name. We passed them in sheets of driving

rain, and so perhaps missed some of their attractions ; but what we saw was bleak and miserable to a degree. I wonder whether the name was given them by a disgruntled English tourist, or by some home-coming Scoto-Indian suffering from disillusionment and a home-made chill on the liver !

We opened an unexpected view as we got to Ullapool—great naval ships looming through the mist and apparently filling the bay. Before anchoring, we took a turn round a couple of them just for the joy of giving and receiving a courteous salute with dipping ensign ! These large ships look so much too aloof to be observant that it is in the nature of a miracle when our little ship's little flag, fluttering down a few feet, produces at once an answering salute from the great one.

We felt much less like saluting them next morning when we found that these large monsters had consumed everything eatable ashore. No milk, no eggs, no bread, no nothing !

" No, m'm, the fleet was ashore this morning and got all we had." We tried to " bespeak " some for next day, but it was no use ; what was our little custom in comparison to the giants ?

Our night at Ullapool was the first thoroughly uncomfortable anchorage we had had. Jack

said it was an excellent one, but he was no doubt taking the point of view of the anchor. We, unfortunately, were not so steady. It wasn't *mal de mer* in its usual sense which worried me, but there are other kinds of *maux de mer*, and the chiefest of these is noise. Everything contrived to add to it—the chain on the bob-stay ; the empty bottles in the bilge ; the ropes against the mast ; one's very watch hanging on its hook ! *And* the dinghy ! The only thing it compared to was a young dog being trained to sleep outside, which whines and snuffles and barks all night ! So did the dinghy. It bumped into one side, then into the other, sometimes with a gentle appealing nuzzle, sometimes with a sharp impatient bump ; always seeming to ask to be taken on board. Jack sleeps unperturbed through all these sorts of annoyances—he doesn't mind the door slamming, a light in his eyes, and the clothes off his toes ; but the Don is more easily upset by " things that go bump in the night," and I heard him climb on deck to see what could be done. I called out to him—

" The dinghy-dog wants to come on board—do tell it to be quiet."

" All right ; I'll try Jack's notion of a submerged bucket over the bows."

" As a muzzle over the bow-wows ? " I said,

knowing Jack to be safely asleep, and that I should not have to follow up any such remark with an explanation.

As, owing to the presence of the silent but hungry Service, we could get nothing to eat, we decided to make for the Outer Hebrides, where such as they were unlikely to follow us ; if the food supply there were limited, it would at least be limited to us.

Jack strongly recommended Tarbert—one of the several Tarberts on these shores,—as we could then go and inspect the Whaling Station on the west side. This was agreed to, but next morning the prospect of reaching anywhere seemed small, as it was a day of misty stillness, and out to the blue-grey west it seemed as though nothing could be nearer than America. Jack thoroughly enjoys a day of this sort—it means endless time for all the hopelessly useful things he loves doing, without interruption from the merely enjoyable side of sailing. We weighed anchor at 9 A.M. I think this is an occasion for expressing it that way—it sounds so much more stationary than getting under way—and it is quite as nautical. Anyhow, we got the anchor up, and then made next to no way ; but Jack spent a happy harrying day rigging up a series of electric bells, *Skeletta's* enormous dimensions making quick communications a matter of pos-

sibly vital importance! Up to now the human voice had answered—and been answered—well enough, but as Jack explained, "One might easily have something happen unexpectedly alone at the tiller, such as . . ." (here followed a list of lurid possible improbabilities!), "when one *must* have help at once, and the other man might not hear . . ."

"Why shouldn't he hear your stentorian voice forty feet away?" I asked.

"Loads of reasons—he might be shovelling coal or frying fish."

"Or perchance he sleepeth," quoth the Don.

"Or the silent primus was lit, and so no other sound could penetrate," suggested Bridget, who had lately had passages with this particular stove.

So all day the White Knight, encumbered with coils of wire, and his mouth full of eye-screws, crept about the ship, always fixing things just where he made one feel most in the way. I wanted him to provide for the even more probable contingency of wishing to make a remark in one part of the yacht without being heard in every other, but the suggestion was considered frivolous.

By the afternoon all was ready, and the lone steersman could now communicate with ease and a horrible metallic birr to either the fo'c'sle or

the main cabin. It only remained to arrange a code on the hotel principle: 1 for the Captain Bold, 2 for the Bos'un Tight, and 3 for the Captain's Gig—and then we could decide which of us was who. The thing worked admirably; indeed, it occasionally rang by itself, probably from "zeal, Mr Easy, just zeal."

There was little else to interest us all day, for the wind was a minus quantity, and we grew tired of interestedly speculating on distant cat's-paws of breeze, which—to be Irish—proved to be no wind at all, but the agitated "escapes and hurried journeys" of the herring fry. The Don and I tried to think sympathetically of the warfare it meant: a slaughter of the innocents between the cod-submarines and the aeroplane-gulls; but it is difficult to wax sentimental over fish, so instead we gave the White Knight our full attention and unstinted good advice.

The Dhuiné-Wassail and Bridget sat on the meat-safe forward of the mast. This is about the best seat in the boat and the nearest to privacy, as the sails and mast make a judicious screen. He was teaching her something with a bit of string—what it was mattered very little, but it kept their heads and hands very close together, and I had some difficulty in keeping the Don close to me.

Bridget is not easily to be explained. I, as

a woman, could see no unusual attraction, and Jack—as one of that intermediate sex, the happily married man—could not explain it either, but there must have been a something to subjugate two such different men as the Don and the Dhuiné-Wassail. Or was it due to a factor more potent even than charm—propinquity ?

By evening we were still circling aimlessly in sight of the mainland we were trying to leave behind, and the Hebrides, which we longed to see ahead, were still invisible.

As an all-night sitting was inevitable—in the present state of things we could not call it a passage,—we were faced with an experience new to most of us. Jack, of course, had known many, and the D.W. said he had also ; but on examination it became clear that his participation in them had not been more active than sleeping in his clothes instead of his pyjamas, and occasionally putting his head up the companion when sufficiently aroused by a change of watch.

Bridget and I scorned the idea of prosaically going to bed, apart from the implication that we were of no use, and I almost recaptured childhood's rapture at being allowed to sit up late !

At sundown, as so often happens, we got a

faint off-shore wind, and as night came on it gave me all the thrill of real adventure to be sailing, ghost-like, in the dark, the sails half invisible and of strange exaggerated height, and no noise but the whispered soliloquising of the dinghy.

Bridget was preparing a meal, and the D.W., though singularly uninterested in culinary arrangements while I directed them, was now earnestly helping. I was on deck steering, with no light but the faint glimmer in the binnacle, and the sails dimly foot-lit by the glow from the skylights ; and all around, the sea unseen, almost unheard—and yet I refrained from quoting Keats to the Don !

From time to time a party of porpoises kept us company unseen, plodding after herring in their painstaking way, and punctuating their revolutions with wheezy breaths like too-fat pugs following their mistress's carriage.

The Mock Turtle told Alice one should never go anywhere without a porpoise—and on the West Coast one seldom does.

By the time Bridget & Co. had got supper ready, I found I was glad enough to go below. Romance and novelty are all very well, but I found they had made me forget such sublunary details as an extra jacket, and I, like everything else on deck, was literally soaked with dew.

I don't know why this should have surprised me, but it did. I suppose I had always thought of dew as a beneficent arrangement for watering the dry land in a manner convenient to garden lovers, but the sea seemed wet enough without any such attention.

The cabin was deliciously stuffy and warm. The petrol-lamps more than fulfil their contract to give light; they throw in—or throw out!—a great deal of heat as well. When Bridget deposited on the table a goodly supply of potatoes—in their jackets—I seized one in each cold paw, for they are as excellent "for external use" as "to be taken," and I felt so grateful to the cooker of them that she seemed almost as attractive as the men-folk thought her. I must have voiced my appreciation emphatically, for the Don rather infelicitously suggested that I seemed to share Weir of Hermiston's views on boiled potatoes; but as Bridget had not read the book, she remained unperturbed, and like Charlotte "went on cutting bread and butter," and it was only the D.W. who looked annoyed.

Jack asked how the binnacle-lights were doing, and in a thoughtless moment of expansion I said they were rather dim. Had I not been suffering from a rush of wellbeing to the head, I would have scented danger—as it was, I blindly precipitated our doom!

"All right," said Jack. "I'll fix up an electric connection which will make it more comfortable for you."

Comfortable! Ye gods!

For the next hour Jack groped about in the dark, one of us holding a light for him, which always shone on the wrong place, and the Don tried to steer by the moon. This was the Skipper's order, but the moon didn't play the game: it played hide-and-seek instead. The poor Don would get the moon conveniently "on the port end of the cross-trees," when she would at once hide in a cloud and stay there. In her absence the Don imagined himself to be steering absolutely steadily, only to find the moon reappear jeeringly somewhere well to starboard of the gaff-end! With his nose glued to the still dark binnacle, Jack would have been none the wiser, but the tell-tale dinghy always chattered loudly about it as the course was hurriedly changed. Then the electrifying skipper would look up at that deceitful orb sailing serenely in an unclouded stretch of sky, and say—

"Dash it all, man" (or words to that effect), "can't you keep the same course for ten minutes? Surely the moon's clear enough."

By about midnight the binnacle was duly electrified, and enjoyed a most admirable light.

Even the "meanest intelligence" should now be able to keep a compass course.

The novelty of night-sailing was wearing off as far as Bridget and I were concerned; indeed, she turned in altogether, and I got a stove going to get hot drinks for the rest of us. The D.W. was doing his trick at the helm. As he said afterwards, "Trick is the *mot juste;* the whole cockpit was one confounded box of tricks."

Suddenly the bell in the fo'c'sle rang long and loud, nor did it cease to ring till we had all tumbled up on deck, expecting to find shipwreck imminent. Nothing to be seen but the D.W., the light from the binnacle illuminating, and, I hope, distorting, a wide grin. The joke appeared to us a feeble one, and we each said so; but he continued to grin and gurgle till he found that Bridget, even Bridget, had been roused from her beauty sleep. This damped his merriment, and he turned on Jack—

"It's all the fault of your confounded zareeba of electric wires. The light suddenly went out, and the bell rang instead. No; I never touched the beastly thing."

Jack examined his connections, and all was well, so he naturally maintained that "some one" had been fooling with it "or something." While the D.W. defied the alligator, and Jack

demonstrated how impossible it was any such thing could happen unprovoked—the blinkin' light blinked again ; and as it shut its eye it opened its mouth and rang a tocsin in the cabin ! Then again, as suddenly, silence and light ! This went on in demented alternation for the next hour. While Jack and the D.W. tried to exorcise the devil that possessed the thing, the Don followed them about, anxiously useless, and I took the helm. Heaven and the moon alone knew where I steered, for every time I looked at the compass the thing was plunged in darkness, and there was a derisive ring instead. At last the light grew fainter and fainter, the bell feebler, and it was as well, for tempers were getting shorter and shorter ; and finally the D.W. in open mutiny prevented the Skipper's further investigations by disconnecting the " blarsted thing " altogether. I never felt so at one with the D.W. before. Had I known a graceful remark of appreciation in Gaelic, I would even have made it.

Further lighting of the wretched " binnigale " was no longer necessary, for the wind had died entirely, and *Skeletta* seemed in as bad a temper as every one else to judge by her bangings and stampings.

After the wind we had been having for some days there was now a very perceptible swell in

the Minch, and *Skeletta* responded to each roll with a bang from the boom, a metallic clank of the main-sheet blocks on the iron horse, and a stammering chorus of imprecations from the reef-points.

Kipling's Ship that Found Herself did a lot of talking, but it is nothing to the swearin' at lairge a sailing-ship does who loses herself in a rolling calm.

When we did make a "land-fall" in the morning, it was not Tarbert, but the island-dotted waters farther south, and we thankfully anchored behind the Groay Islands—and went to sleep! . . .

As we emerged on deck after breakfast a local fisherman passed in his small boat, and his cheery greeting, "It's a fine evening," brought home to us with a sudden shock that we had breakfasted at about 4 o'clock! Fortunately July in these latitudes gives one enough daylight even to waste. No one felt in the least inclined to set sail again, so Jack was unopposed when he declared his intention of getting through a variety of "chores." The dinghy especially ought to be seen to after her hard hammering in the Minch: not that she seemed to be any the worse, but just "in case."

The D.W., with the guile of the serpent, had arranged with Bridget that they should walk

to the P.O., and the Don, I am not sure whether in the character of dove or serpent No. 2, said he would join them. As this arrangement could only result in their respective bad temper and gloom, I had to interfere even at the risk of seeming to strain my prerogative of hostess.

"My dear Don, have you forgotten that the Skipper has ordained that the dinghy be taken ashore and turned upside down and vetted? Are you leaving me unaided to wrestle with the contents of the tool-locker at Jack's dictation? You know I never remember which is which of his innumerable weapons, and it is more seemly he should swear at you than at me. Anyway, I want to make some most necessary scones—the bread is very *passé*."

As an appeal for help it was feeble, as the Don knows no tool by name but a hammer or a saw, let alone the subtle nuance of difference between a tommy-bar and a box-spanner, but as a hint it left little to be desired, and had the merit of achieving its purpose.

As the shore was very rough and boulder-strewn, the dinghy's operation was to take place on one of the many small islands, which were all smooth rock and rough grass. When the crew had all been disposed of—Bridget and the D.W. ashore, and the other two on the island —I went below to attend to household matters.

I had just got to the messiest stage of scone-making, the mass of dough was on the board and my hands and most of my person covered with flour, when I heard shouts as of one in dire peril. With the rolling-pin in my hand, I shot up through the fo'c'sle hatch to see what was happening. The shouts had ceased as suddenly as they had begun, and all was as heavenly peaceful as before. I naturally looked for the two on the island. There was the upside-down dinghy right enough, but alone, and Jack fleeing from it "as though some dreadful fiend did close behind him tread." Another glance showed me he was running *to* something, not *from* it, and the something was the Don involved in hand-to-horn combat with a goat! The devil himself—the goat's first cousin!—could not have been a more surprising sight in this uninhabited land! I watched the duel with fascination. Instead of disentangling himself, the Don seemed to grapple the goat to his bosom—no, bosom is a euphemism,—but anyhow, he held on rather than let go. When Jack arrived on the scene, with true wifely faith I supposed all would now be well, and bethought me of my oven, which would probably be red-hot. When I looked up again after a moment's argument with dampers, it was to find the goat still involved with a human figure, but this time Jack's, and the

Don was hurriedly trying to right the dinghy and launch her, which efforts were hastened but not improved by calls of, "Hurry up, man, can't you. Damit, hurry up!" from the goat-encompassed Jack. The last scene of this strange eventful history now began. Jack and the Don, each hanging on to one horn, hauled the apparently reluctant goat with them towards the boat. It seemed to me they might as well let it go now if it wanted to, as it was no use to us, unless indeed the White Knight contemplated some future use for it unforeseeable to any but himself! As they neared the shore, the Don tripped and fell over backwards, and the goat showed his true intentions by immediately shaking off Jack's restraining hand, and, head well down, making for the prostrate Don. I thought the end had come, but the Don, with an agility hitherto unsuspected, scrambled to his feet and leapt into the dinghy, the devil's horns an inch behind his flying feet. It gave one baleful glance at its escaped prey, then shot itself, as though fired from a catapult, at Jack. But the *modus operandi* was now clear—haul, and the goat goes with you; let go, and he butts you down! Hanging on to his reluctant horns, the two made their retreat to the boat and their inglorious escape. They came on board full of their dreadful adventure. The goat had come suddenly

upon the Don, who was looking for some piece of wood for Jack's purposes; it had evidently been browsing on the farther side of the island, and had not realised their intrusion.

"I hardly knew what the creature was till it was upon me," said the Don, "and then it was impossible to get away from it. A line from a hymn I was taught in childhood came back to me, and I understood at last the true meaning of its then incomprehensible petition: 'From the he-goats separate me.' I don't remember the next line, but to judge by this he-goat I should say it was to the effect of 'With deodorants inundate me.'"

I murmured a pious Amen! The Don continued, "The sincerity of the sentiment must compensate for the halting rhythm, as in many other hymns."

VII.

We finished the evening playing bridge; at least that is what the other four imagined themselves to be doing, but when two rubbers had been lost entirely on revokes they gave up, and instead helped me to write my letters with suggestions as bright as their card-playing. Correspondence does not take up much of our time. It consists chiefly of post-cards, ordering provisions, and telegrams asking where they are. Since the Mallaig incident we try to keep to stores that are good travellers—and whisky. Although this is the wine of the country, we find it easier to get it from the Army and Navy Stores! Most of the larger hotels keep only the more fancy makes desired of the tourist, and the small inns keep a "blend" which owes any flavour it has to the local water. But occasionally even in this postless existence a letter does track us down and demands an instant answer; and it is no doubt against these rare disasters that Jack provides books

of prepaid telegrams. I had never dreamed of telegrams on such a wholesale scale till I met *Skeletta!* Till then I had seen telegrams used only for occasions of births, deaths, marriages, and missed trains; but Jack and *Skeletta* between them put life on a much more dramatic and expensive level.

Amongst our "sevenpenny" books we have one on Psycho-analysis, and having read it, I have come to the conclusion that *Skeletta* is not just a hobby with Jack, but really represents a suppressed polygamy complex! I am, of course, glad the polygamy is suppressed, but I rather wish I knew how to suppress *Skeletta*, though I cannot hurt Jack's feelings by saying so. I believe a really nice polygamous man would, just like Jack, be so surprised and disappointed if his favourite wives didn't like one another.

Before leaving the Groay Islands Jack thought we should renew our stock of sand-eels, as the preserved ones had perished in the flight from the locker. The Don, with unusual alacrity, volunteered to get them, "and Miss Warden will perhaps help me to recognise the creatures when we meet them." I suppose Bridget felt that she owed him something to equalise her walk with the Dhuiné-Wassail, and so they set off in the dinghy. It now became my pleasing

duty to sit in the cockpit mending the burgee (in itself a hateful occupation), and talk to a man who quite obviously did not wish to listen. At last the D.W. burst out—

"Does the silly ass suppose they climb trees or grow in bunches like catkins?"

"What ass, and what 'they'?" I naturally asked.

"Stuart and sand-eels," he snorted. "Look at him climbing up a tree when he is supposed to be catching sand-eels on the shore."

"You never can tell with the Don," I said. "The last time I saw him up a tree he was fishing, and it was the only tree anywhere near the loch. Yet somehow his cast was in the upper branches." I gazed at the shore where the Don was now descending to earth again. "If they are bunches of sand-eels, then Bridget is cherishing a half-warmed fish in her bosom; but perhaps it's only honeysuckle she is pinning in her dress—there always is a lot amongst these woods."

It was, of course; and I need hardly add it was the only thing they brought back with them. Not an eel had they seen, although from Jack's account when he went later himself the eels had almost run out to meet him and fawned on his feet. This time Jack decided his new collection was to be kept fresh and lively in a

bucket of water over the stern. I daresay they would have kept well enough, and one might possibly some day have fished with them if time and place did then adhere, but the Don forgot there was anything in the bucket next morning, and sluiced down the deck with them.

There was no pang in parting from the sand-eels or the he-goat, but I was sorry to leave the only other inhabitants of these parts—the seals. There were many families of them, and though of a retiring disposition, they were also very inquisitive. Constantly quite close to us, they raised their wet pussy-heads and gazed at us with large speculative eyes. Jack says they love music, which I think must be true, for they always sank with one accord when the Dhuiné-Wassail raised his voice in song.

Buying a newspaper at Loch Maddy, whence we had gone from the Groay Islands, brought home to us with rather a shock that to the calendar-bound world time was getting on into August ; and although we ourselves still had some uncharted time left, our crew began to feel the call of the land—for the D.W. grouse and Highland gatherings, for the Don elderly female relatives and boredom !

I have often wondered what individuals lived so detached an existence as to require one of these complicated clocks that tell the day of

the week and the month, and sometimes even the year. Now I know. They are cruising yachtsmen. Nothing so obliterates the sense of time as this meandering sea life. No newspapers, no appointments, no half-holiday, no day of rest! One grows completely accustomed to it, and the inconvenience is really *nil*, but once ashore one might find the habit of ignoring the calendar awkward at times, and so purchase an informative clock. I think I must save up and buy one for Jack. I am sure he would rather find the date that way with all the added zest of having to allow for the vagaries of the clockwork, and at the end of December he might even have a day or two over which he could hurry away and spend with *Skeletta* while ordinary people were plodding along to the accepted end of the year.

In our untrammelled wanderings on the chart we had decided to call at various places in Skye, which would have pleased us all: good anchorage for *Skeletta;* lots of lochs unknown to Jack, where he could take innumerable "cross-bearings" for some recondite purpose; plenty of Jacobitish sentiment for the Dhuiné-Wassail and Gaelic-speaking aborigines to practise on; for the Don and myself much romantic-looking scenery, to judge by the amount of dark brown on the map we surreptitiously consulted. We

had to look at it unbeknown to Jack, for he scorns anything but contour lines. I daresay it is very admirable to be able mentally to reconstruct Skye from contour lines, but I rather think that Jack also resolves Skye back into contour lines when he is really there, which seems a pity. Bridget was amiably indifferent as to where we went, for she never had got it quite clear in her head where she was anyway, and cheerfully expected mainland or Hebrides to turn up at any point of the compass. But this very definitely dated newspaper upset our plans altogether, and a real "passage" was decided on—namely, to make straight for the west coast of Mull. *Skeletta* and I have one point in common. When starting on a walk a little too long for me, I do like to know there is a railway or some such thing to fall back on if I fail to carry on, and *Skeletta*, with a long passage ahead, likes to arrange for a possible anchorage should she also want to give up. This time we had both the south-west of Skye and the island of Canna more or less at hand should she decide to use them.

There was a good strong breeze from the S.S.W. when we started, which meant a beat to start with, but it seemed to be veering more to the west, which suited well for our proposed course. Of course, there was a sharp shower

just as we were getting the sails up. Rain when getting under way seems as inevitable as a squall when anchoring. It seems part of the game that a shower should choose the moment when every one is without protection—not only without oilskins, but without coats. It also helps to stiffen the sails, and makes them harder to get up. Just as we got out from Loch Maddy, a yawl of about our own size came down from the north, and was pointing the same course as ourselves. An unofficial, unannounced race at once began, each, of course, pretending that no thought of competition had entered his head!

"We should overtake her easily," announced Jack, "for she hasn't our spread of sail. Even if she puts up her topsail, we have a bigger mainsail."

We took it in turns to steer, but no one could satisfy our boat-proud Skipper—the sails were pulled in and let out and tightened and manœuvred in every way, but still the yawl kept ahead.

"Surely you can point higher, you're right off the wind. Look how high she's pointing. Don't shake her, bear away! Now luff a bit —she's pointing higher than you are."

The agitated steersman would expostulate that the burgee was all right. "Oh, damn the burgee

—look how much higher the yawl's pointing. We ought to do just as well if not better."

Jack was far too busy rearranging sails to try steering himself. "Any idiot could steer her if they would attend to it. There, your foresail's shaking again! Oh, don't bear her right away! Look at the yawl." Then if one did look at the yawl, one was told to watch one's head-sails! The race was beginning to wear out the temper of the entire crew, when suddenly the yawl changed her course and went straight in the wind's eye, making for Loch Skiport in South Uist! For one moment we were all completely taken aback, till we realised that she had been using a motor all the time! What a waste of nervous energy! After that I quite openly admired the scenery for a time, and steered her well off the wind for the joy of the heel and the motion, and Jack refrained from admonishing me.

As we had hoped, the wind did free us very much during the day, and we had a splendid reach as far as Rum. A broad reach is the best of all sailing for a long run. It makes no undue demands on the attention of the helmsman, and the pace is good and the angle of the waves gives the boat almost the motion of a smooth jumping horse. Beating is splendid for a short time, but becomes very tiring for every one.

As for a run—I think it is a waste of wind every time! I grant its sheer usefulness in making a passage, but there is no exhilaration in it, and only much anxiety. The motion too is hateful —like perpetual side-slips, and the possibility of a gybe is always imminent to my mind. Jack urges me to point lower and lower, but the moment the empty head-sails begin coming over, my nerve vanishes, and up I come again to be scorned anew by the Owner, who seems to enjoy seeing the very boom begin to lift!

We had some of this dull useful running from Ardnamurchan southwards, but as it was now getting dark, and really to get somewhere was more important than merely to enjoy getting there, I left the steering to more experienced hands, and did the Martha business below instead.

The binnacle was happy if dim, with its old-fashioned but reliable oil-lamps. The electric sprite who had so tormented us before had at last been located by Jack in a drip of water on the binnacle, which, as it gathered, made a momentary short circuit, and having dropped, the cause of the damage vanished for the time being, and was impossible to detect.

Being conservative and unmechanical, like most women, I secretly like the old-fashioned methods, and would prefer to have the cabin

lit by candles instead of those petrol-gas affairs that will never do more than flutter and faint at my hands. But mechanisms which have many ways of going wrong are as the zest of life to the White Knight, and their possible wants give him excuse enough for hoarding tinfoil, odd bits of metal, strands of wire, oddments of rubber—in fact, all that most people put in the waste-paper basket. Our first little domestic found it very hard not to tidy away his treasures, till I explained to her their great latent usefulness. She was much impressed. "The master's such a deep-thoughted gentleman," she admiringly concluded!

We had started before 8 A.M., and by evening we were running into Loch Tuad, and anchored in Soriby Bay—another apparently desolate spot. There seems to be a great deal of room still in Scotland: we hardly saw a house in the Hebrides, and all this region seemed equally uninhabited. It was pretty dark when we anchored, and the marks we were supposed to pick up almost invisible. The "fir-tree, conspicuous, in line with stone cairn of Ben something or other," was conspicuous only by its absence; the only really noticeable features were the noise of waterfalls and the scent of bog-myrtle, but neither was mentioned in the sailing directions. Judging one's distance off-shore in the dark is ex-

traordinarily difficult, so Jack had to go paddling around and sounding to make sure where we were. *Skeletta's* dignity would greatly suffer if she woke up on a receding tide. The phlegmatic fishing-boats just sit down and wait for the tide to return in due season, but *Skeletta* is too highly strung—at least too highly keeled, and would proceed to throw herself down in hysteric despair! Naturally Jack was anxious to prevent any such scene. He returned only half-convinced we were where we meant to be, but it seemed all right, and probably the tree had been cut down, no survey officer being present to pray the woodman to spare it.

VIII.

NEXT morning found us still safely afloat, but the swell came into our little bay more than was comfortable. When I went through to the main cabin *en route* for the kitchen, I found only the Don there, who told me that the other two were getting breakfast ready, as they had been up early anyhow. I sat down with relief. The swell was just enough to make the prospect of cooking rather unattractive. The Don seemed to have found even dressing enough, for he sat in the thoughtful unoccupied silence typical of pre-breakfast rolling. From the fo'c'sle came curious hissing and explosive sounds, which at first I listened to with apathy, then with curiosity.

"Oh, *that's* been going on for ages," the Don answered gloomily to my inquiry.

Bridget now emerged from the after-cabin, but having put her head in for a moment and sourly inquired, "What's that awful smell?" she hastily ascended on deck. I felt I must

get breakfast soon or succumb, so I opened the fo'c'sle door. It was like looking into a particularly noisome inferno! Through the clouds of acrid smoke, I saw the dim form of Jack holding a cauldron of boiling, smoking, burning fat, into which at intervals a perspiring Dhuiné-Wassail dropped, from a safe height, a shattered egg! It was an atmosphere calculated to make one ill even on land, but "my good woman, you can't be sick here," I said to myself, and the obvious necessity for action banished any further remembrance of the motion. The Don had given one glance over my shoulder, and his usual careful diction was so upset that he slipped into a Spoonerism.

"That's a smelthy hell," he gasped, and then bolted on deck!

Luckily there were some eggs still unexploded, and boiling was a clean relief after the other pan and its contents had gone overboard.

Loch Tuad looked a most attractive place to stay in, and with the dinghy we could have sailed round Ulva's Isle while the D.W. "obliged" with "Lord Ullin's Daughter," but there was no time. To Gigha we had to go, and there await the proper moment for going round the Mull. The sea outside was pretty big. The morning was grey and overcast, and the barren Tresnish Islands looked extraordinarily desolate

and forbidding, encircled with white breakers. The wind was now north of west, so we had it on the quarter till we rounded Iona—to my way of thinking a great improvement to a dead run. The dinghy shares my nervousness about a following wind and sea, and makes pathetic efforts to overtake us and climb in over the counter. There was some debate as to the best means to circumvent her : to tie her up so short that she could get no run for a jump, or to give her so long a painter that she would have no jump left at the end of her run. The latter was agreed on, and there the little poor creature remained the rest of the day, making persistent courageous rushes to reach us, and being always frustrated ! We passed Iona in a shower of rain, which perhaps accounted for its not seeming to us composed of primary colours and Chinese white. We thought it looked rather better as it was.

After leaving Iona we passed close to Earraid Island, where David Balfour suffered so much unnecessary misery. For a man of action he was curiously unpractical. Stevenson always writes enthusiastically about sailing, but most of his experiences of it were in warmer seas than ours, which no doubt coloured his views. He asserts that there is no use in having an income of more than £700 a year (pre-war !)

except to have a yacht or a string quartette. Jack is an even greater enthusiast, for he is capable of trying to run a yacht *on* £700 or its post-war equivalent! But at least it is more fun than a string quartette.

We reached Gigha in time for a reasonable supper, and were saved the messy muddly business of clearing up the deck after dark. Bridget's persistence in pronouncing the middle G in Gigha caused the devoted D.W. some pain. I liked it, for it reminded one of Prince Giglio, the hero in Thackeray's 'Rose and the Ring,' whom as a child I always called Prince Gigglio, and yet thought romantic!

Tide calculations are more than usually necessary to get round the Mull of Cantyre successfully. To miss one's connection so to speak, and have to mark time for six hours in an Atlantic swell, is a risk not to be run lightly nor unadvisedly. Jack's mental arithmetic is always carried on aloud, punctuated with "that's right, isn't it?" to any one who appears to be listening. I, who never have an idea whether it's right or not, take the risk of saying "yes," but with a convincing hesitation as of a slower mind arriving at the same conclusion. With this amount of help from me, the Skipper decided that we must start about 8 A.M., and would have ample time to catch our tide con-

nection off the lighthouse, and short of disaster reach Campbeltown in time for dinner. This dinner was to be a great affair ! Our crew were going to stand Owner, Bridget, and myself a regular royal feed ashore, everything we couldn't cook ourselves, and no washing up afterwards ! Like Arctic explorers, we spent some time inventing desirable menus, our imaginations unhampered by the fact that Campbeltown does not boast a Carlton or a Ritz. It seems quite pathetic looking back on it, for those imaginings were all we ever had of that dinner ! When we reached Campbeltown it was between twelve and one in the morning, when even a Ritz or Carlton would have been useless to us.

I must have put in a thoughtful " yes " or so too many, for something certainly went wrong with those calculations, and the tide behaved as it proverbially does, and did not wait for us. The train analogy is misleading. When you miss a train, you may at least remain *in situ* till another turns up ; but if you miss a tide, the wrong one insists on carrying you some way back with it ! This delay, even with a strengthening wind, meant it was about 9 o'clock when we reached Sanda, the south-east corner of Cantyre. Our dinner was already but a dream, for it is a good twelve miles farther to Campbeltown, so we decided to anchor near

the lighthouse. To us there seemed to be an anchor marked on our chart, but now I think it must have been the footprint of a currant from the cake we ate while consulting it, for there certainly is no anchorage in the actual sea. We ran into the little bay with a great air of knowing what we were doing, and anchored, as it seemed to me, far too near the shore. I was in an agony of anxiety, and the lighthouse keepers evidently shared my feelings, for they began shouting and gesticulating wildly. Jack said they were semaphoring, and had he been quietly ashore I daresay he would have understood it; but his pre-occupation with *Skeletta* and her inadequate crew made concentration impossible, so these epileptic wavings remained unintelligible, except as a general indication that all was not well, which indeed we already suspected. As no rest was to be had there, our hard-worked "crew" had to get up anchor again with comments appropriate to the job, and out we rushed in the gathering storm and darkness round the corner and up the coast. First the foresail, then even the jib had to be lowered—this latter a nervous business for amateurs, as *Skeletta* was plunging her whole bowsprit under every few seconds. The Don nearly caused a catastrophe by bursting his braces at a critical moment, which quite in-

capacitated him, whether from the fault of his Maker or his tailor, I don't know, but not even the axiom of duty before decency would keep him on deck till he had carried out repairs. Just off Davarr Lighthouse, Jack, who was steering, shouted to me to go and see how close we could go to it. By now it was quite dark, and no one had had time to light the cabin lamps, so I stumbled into the pitch-black cabin and began to grope for matches to light the emergency candles, Jack meantime shouting directions where to find some, and anyhow to hurry up. All I found was a box of fusees, and, as in a nightmare, tried to light the candle with them! Another howl from on deck made me nearly weep aloud, but then fortunately I found some real matches. With feverish haste I got the chart laid out on the table, and tried to find out which sort of scale the beastly thing was on, the candle meantime dripping all over it. Just then came such a bump that the chart weights and candle flew off the table, and I knew that we had hit the lighthouse itself! I scrambled on deck that I might at least die in the open, but we were still rushing ahead, Jack, now silent, at the helm, and Davarr light far astern!

"O Jack! *What* happened?"

"Just a rather heavier sea, and I took it

badly—that lighthouse blinds you like the head-lights of a motor-car when the beam swings across the boat."

"I'm awfully sorry," I explained, "that I didn't get the depth in time."

"Never mind that now; come up and look for the lights we should pick up at the entrance. I can only see one, and there should be three."

This was the first time I had ever felt grave doubts of Jack's knowledge, and real anxiety for our safety. I had never been near Campbeltown even in daylight, and at the moment I thought Jack had not either, and here we were rushing into an unknown harbour in the mirk darkness at apparently forty miles an hour! I don't yet know where the other lights went, but we never saw them. While I was still gazing into the darkness for them, we opened up the whole lights of the town.

As it is not possible both to steer in a gale and look through night-glasses, Jack shouted to us—

"How many boats are there at anchor?" Impossible question! All the lights were hopelessly mixed. Those we thought were riding-lights turned out to be pier-lights; what I thought were mast-head lights were shore lights, and so on. I became more and more nervous.

"Jack, do anchor now. Don't go farther in;

we're sure to hit something or run aground." But the Skipper, knowing the proper spot was well in near the town, would not stop till he reached it. We rushed on till it seemed to my excited gaze that we would run into the main street, and I wailed aloud to Jack to anchor—just to please me. I think this breakdown into helpless silliness appealed to Jack, for in theory he likes the sweet helpless type of woman, so he graciously agreed to anchor then and there, in spite of his better judgment. Next morning when we awoke to find ourselves in the very centre of the loch, with about a two-miles' row to get ashore in any direction, I am afraid he repented of his chivalry, but I hope he was also a little relieved that I am not habitually a sweet woman!

Our lost dinner was an abiding sorrow, and somehow lunch ashore, now we were actually there, did not seem a satisfactory substitute. Then came the happy thought! Why not *all* go to Glasgow together? The three guests were bound for there anyhow, and *Skeletta* could be locked up and put under the eye of a friend ashore until we could return and take her back to her cupboard. The proposal was carried unanimously at a full meeting.

The last we saw of *Skeletta* was from the deck of the *Queen Alexandra*. She looked very

quiet and prim with her sails all stowed beneath their canvas cover, the hatches locked, and the burgee and ensign invisible, not even the friendly little dinghy-dog on its leash!

The dinner was as near our dreams as is desirable in reality. The Don, freed from the wheel of practical affairs, was at his best just talking, and before we parted he proposed *Skeletta's* health, to which, as Jack's other wife, I felt I should reply.

Women are the practical sex, men the sentimental, and all the Don said of adventure, beauty, and freedom I do acknowledge to be true of yachting, certainly of sailing; but my own final reflections on the cruise were less high-minded. I have heard the mothers of families express feelings much like mine at the end of the holidays: "Yes, we had such a delightful time, and of course the children enjoyed it all immensely, and it *was* so nice having them all at home—but I am rather glad it is safely over!" And by Christmas-time they and I will see it all *couleur de rose*, and will be planning just such holidays again for the next time!

IX.

All winter Jack and I were rather at cross-purposes—not, of course, that Jack knew it! With complete unconsciousness of any lack of enthusiastic response from me, he cheerfully passed most evenings and every Sunday talking about and making plans for *Skeletta's* reappearance in the summer. In return, I read aloud notices from the papers of glorious foreign tours (prices generally unspecified) and advertisements of seemingly ideal cottages in the country, and met with much the same response—uninterested "ahs" and "m'ms." Jack is used to my doing a good deal of talking without any fixed intent to it, and when uninterested withdraws his serious attention; but I dare not do this with his prattlings, however monotonously maritime. Sometime I may make an assenting grunt too many, and find myself committed to a scheme for lighting *Skeletta* with acetylene, or installing a hot-water system! No knight of chivalry could have been more tediously one-

ideaed about his Lady Fair than the White Knight about his *Lady Skeletta!* I suppose it never occurred to either of them that their hearers could possibly be any less enthusiastic! Yet I never had quite the heart—or was it merely nerve?—to say plainly and succinctly: "Oh, take the nasty boat away; I don't want any boat to-day—or any other day." And the unconscious one went on making plans for her and me—but always combined!

In the pent-up bitterness of my heart I said something of what I felt one evening when the Don was dining with us and the inevitable subject came up. Pained and surprised, he said—

"But, my dear lady, are you seriously wishing me to believe that you do not care for sailing?" And the question cleared my own mind on the subject, for with almost equally pained surprise I answered—

"Of course not—I love sailing."

"Then?" the puzzled frown deepening.

"But I hate cooking; I loathe washing-up, and the fo'c'sle gives me curvature of the spine."

The Don was sympathetic and relieved; but with a glance at Jack, who was busy making ornamental ends to new man-ropes, he murmured—

"It is as well, perhaps, that Jack does not always listen to half you say."

But in this instance he had listened more than we thought, for *Skeletta* vanished from his talk for some time after this, and I, partly from perversity, perhaps, but chiefly from a guilty conscience, began to miss her.

This could not go on long; neither puzzlement nor pique could keep Jack off his pet subject, but now it took the form of endless splendid ideas to save me work in the fo'c'sle! It was very sweet of him, of course, but I began to feel like the super-domesticated mother of the Swiss Family Robinson: when all the rest started out for glorious encounters with interesting animals and educative plants, she remained behind as a matter of course, and was duly elated when, on their return, papa presented her with something new to cook in or to sew with!

All that happened was that I gave up drawing Jack's attention to the Shipping or Estate notices, but pored over them alone, as over a secret sorrow. It was no doubt a far, far better thing I was going to do—but then I *had* done it before!

The virtue was rewarded. A "bull," a "bear," or perhaps a "stag" did something unforeseen but pleasing in the Stock Exchange Circus. In fiction it is as easy to make one's hero a millionaire as anything less, but in real

life one is exceedingly pleased with £100, or, to continue zoologically, even a "pony"! And it was something between the one and the other that Jack triumphantly acquired. *My* rapture was modified; for I knew that no alternative method of spending it would occur to Jack but to lay it at the feet, so to speak, of *Skeletta*, and some more complicated labour-saving horror would be given to me, and we would cruise for an extra fortnight.

I was wrong. The money was laid at *my* feet. Of course *Skeletta* was involved in it, and by that much I was right, but for once she was a secondary consideration. The money would be spent *in Skeletta*, but *for* me, for—we should have a crew! Like every granted human wish, I began at once to see the disadvantages! A crew would occupy the loathed fo'c'sle instead of me—but it would also occupy the fo'c'sle berths instead of our friends!

"If one could only contrive to get a *collapsible* crew," I sighed. Words of ill-omen! They came back ofttimes to mock us!

Most yachts fit out in May, and their crews are engaged to put through that lengthy job. This was another bright prospect for me, though a gloomy one for Jack, who hated to think of mere hirelings enjoying all the glorious rummagings and pulley-haulings that fitting out

entails! As we could not get away till July, not even I could see any sense in paying a crew to loaf at our expense for two months.

"Plenty of good men who will be glad enough of the job when we start," was Jack's verdict. I believed him.

"Poor Isobel; poor simple Isobel!"

We found we could not get the D.W. to come with us, as he had "a previous engagement," which, being interpreted, meant he hoped to have one to announce!

I am afraid the D.W. considers me lacking in "soul" and "womanly sweetness," chiefly, I think, from my want of appreciation of matters Celtic. Also I occasionally argue in defence of my own opinion instead of humbly adopting his, and he is of those who think a really *nice* woman is necessarily rather a fool. At one of our last verbal scrappings he ended by remarking, "I have always thought it would be a mistake to marry a clever woman"; and when Jack laughingly added, "And since living on *Skeletta* you know it!" I was left wondering whether the balance were a credit or debit one for me!

The particular object of the Dhuiné-Wassail's admiration at the moment was unknown to me by name; but from his description I gathered that, like Weir of Hermiston, he found her "somehow suitable," and chiefly from her

having what they both mistakenly thought an ornament to woman—a weak head!

For that or other reasons, the good D.W. was preparing to be co-guest with this meritorious damsel at as many country houses as he could manage to get invited to, and *Skeletta* would know him no more.

But the Don was delighted to come, and more of my way of thinking about the professional crew than of Jack's. The poor man was always so anxious to help with the "chores," and so unfailingly useless at them, that he worried himself without helping any one else, but now he and I could "just talk" without our Skipper's justified strictures on our laziness. The Don said—

"You and I, madame, will supply the Celtic element in happy contrast to our English host."

I disclaimed the slightest Celtic tendency, thinking of the D.W. and his unappreciated Gaelic, but the Don went on—

"Perhaps I should have said Latin to explain myself, but I was thinking of Kipling's lines—

> 'And while the Celt is talking from Valencia to Kirkwall,
> The English—ah, the English!—don't say anything at all!'"

In accordance with the maxim that we needs must love the highest when we know it, Jack

has a conviction that every one *must* enjoy yachting when they try it—the difficulty is to get the right people to want to try it! To explain all the joys of it to a man who finishes with saying, "But what do you *do* all day?" must be as trying to Jack's ardent soul as atheism to a religious proselytiser!

With those difficulties, why not go alone, one might say—and it would probably be a motorist who said so. The larger the car, the oftener one sees it mostly empty, although it takes less love for one's fellow-creatures to suffer it to sit beside one than to live with it, night and day, in close proximity! The sailing fraternity is rather more hospitable, or more fanatical, but for whichever reason it seemed to us unthinkable to have an empty berth on *Skeletta.*

At last we thought the Lord had provided a ram, in the form of an old friend of Jack's, home from India. We had him to dine—showed him photographs, covered the table with charts, gave him a glowing account of our last cruise—Miss Keatley and all—and Jack even showed him his latest device for washing potatoes with the least amount of labour; who could have resisted an invitation to come too? Our guest was not an exuberant talker, but at the end of an hour or so he managed to get in a word.

"My dear fellow, your picture of an ideal summer has been most adequately expressed; there is, as far as I can see, only one drawback, and that is this climate. I am like the Frenchman who visited one of our triste London Exhibitions, and asked, 'Je viens d'arriver. Où est la sortie?' I am just home, and I am going off again as soon as may be; nothing north of the Mediterranean is any good to me. But if you really want some one who is keen on being uncomfortable—I mean keen on any sporting offer,—what about my boy? He's only eighteen, but what he lacks in age he makes up in adaptability—a quality I have not enough of for your purposes. Anyhow, if you get no one else" (he seemed to take a low view of the probable popularity of our invitation!), "and care to risk it, you can let me know"; and he left it at that.

The more I thought of it, the more the idea smiled to me. Jack has a barely repressed passion for teaching, which does not get an encouraging outlet in the Stock Exchange, and my early enthusiasm for being taught is fading away. So it seemed to me a boy from college would be not only keen and strong physically, but very biddable, and would gratefully absorb all the information that always oozes, and sometimes gushes, out of Jack. Again I say,

"Poor simple Isobel!" But I did not say it then; I went on encouraging Jack to ask the youth—and he began to feel a sort of missionary zeal about him.

"Like all these young idiots, I suppose he would spend the summer dashing about the country on a motor-bike, or endangering the moors to decent men; much better for him to learn a bit about a boat—though, of course, he can't learn much in a month, though he'll think he knows everything."

Jack proved rather nearer the mark than I, which seems strange, but after all he must once have been a boy of eighteen himself, and remembered it subconsciously.

The youth came to see us—came, and conquered me at least. Jack was a shade less enthusiastic, as he found the boy's only experience with boats was with motors—and motors to a sailing enthusiast are as worms to the dry-fly man! But the youth seemed a good youth, and Jack began to look upon him as a brand worth saving from the burning, the which he would think a suitable end for the Devotees of the Internal Combustion God.

Jack could not get away till July, so I went to *Skeletta's* seaside cupboard by myself in the middle of June. After one summer's practice,

and a long winter's theories, I felt quite capable of seeing the ship put in commission.

Skeletta was in the water all right, with her main features apparently in place; but when I saw how much had been left in the store, I could not but fear that there were too many wheels over, as in amateur clock-mending. Jack, I was sure, would find lists of vital things undone. I had a little list of the more probable ones which certainly would be missed, and counted on this to invest me with importance in the eyes of the crew. While I was stumbling about the yard with the Boss, *Skeletta's* dinghy came ashore, and I found myself gazing at that wonderful, longed-for, expensive luxury, the crew! The Boss said they were the crew. I could not have guessed it. In the innocence of my inexperience I had pictured them as smart naval-looking beings, garbed in blue uniforms with brass buttons, or at least jaunty-looking jerseys bearing *Skeletta's* name proudly on their chests.

"Duncan Donaldson, the Skipper," said the Boss—"and Peter M'Caskin, the Mate."

The former, being a permanent Highlander as well as a temporary skipper, and so on a footing of solemn equality, shook hands with me, but Peter, being but a local production, merely grinned like an embarrassed sheep

instead. In neither was there any sign or promise of yachting attire—nothing could have been less like a "snapshot from Cowes" or "the Clyde yachting season" pictures in the illustrated weeklies. Donaldson was arrayed in a collarless flannel shirt of indeterminate hue, fortunately partially covered by a waistcoat with a dubious past, and his head-gear was a depressed remnant of a "peaked cap." Jack had warned me that I would know the Skipper from his inferior satellite by this precious possession—a "peaked cap"—or, in ordinary parlance, a yachting-cap, the more menial second hand—or the third, fourth, fifth, or sixth hands, being only adorned with round caps, no more glorious than an ordinary sailor's!

No such insignia of servitude graced the touzled head of Peter M'Caskin—but a loathsome creation in checks, which made me think of the bowsprit which got mixed with the rudder sometimes, as he wore it with the peak down the neck! On his body he wore a yacht-hand's jersey right enough, but the yacht's name was not *Skeletta*, nor was it worn in front, but behind! I gathered that this was from the last boat he served, and if he were not exactly off with the old love before being on with the new, he had at least turned his back on her!

I started off on my list of questions, to each of which Duncan answered with soothing gentleness—

"Yess, yess; that will pe quite right," as though speaking to a delirious child.

Peter evidently considered that they also serve who only stand and grin, and between them my small stock of confidence in my nautical knowledge died away. During the winter I had become quite glib about garboards and stringers, and hanging knees, and suchlike; but now I began to doubt if such things were really more probable than they sounded! A little more grinning and soothing, and I fell back on the Sweet Woman's way of describing rather than cataloguing, and even reef-points were in danger of becoming "those funny little bits of string on the sail."

After my arrival the clothes question became less acute. *Skeletta's* own name and designation burned in red letters on her servitor's chest, and the Skipper wore a collar, and a waistcoat gorgeous with those longed-for brass buttons—a happier waistcoat than the last, I hope, for it had no apparent history.

Jack, the Don, and the Youth were all to arrive together, and I had lengthy instructions beforehand from Jack to ensure everything being ready to start at once. I

humbly put them before "Tuncan," so my recital had an obligato of "Yess, yess, chust so's."

We had all our provisions, I knew, as I had personally unpacked mighty boxes from the Stores, strewing the surrounding sea with straw, paper, and empty boxes in a manner worthy of the average tripper picnicking in a private park! The sea does not really like it either, I believe, but the tidying tides are more patient and efficient than any keeper or gardener.

Jack had done some of the grocery-ordering himself this year—on the principle that it is better to go bankrupt for a sheep than a lamb, and having got the sheep disguised as a crew, we might as well have what lamb we wanted to eat, or, as he summarised it, "even a s'nice s'mince-pie." The only verse Jack ever seems to remember arises ghost-like from the pantomine "hits" of several years before. I once, for one breathless moment, thought he was reading Browning, for he was poring over a little blue book exactly the same as the one I was reading, 'The Ring and the Book.' I sat very quiet, so as not to interrupt him, though I longed to know which of Browning's poems had so unexpectedly absorbed him. Perhaps he was even thinking of my patient anxious efforts

to profit by all his expositions of sea-learning as he read—

> "Teach me, only teach Love, as I ought,
> I will speak thy speech, Love, think thy thought"

—thoughts of grommets and gaskets, and bights and hitches, I suppose! I tried to remember if Browning had written anything about boats, but could only remember "A Last Ride" —no First Sail Together, though it would be quite a good subject for forcible cacophonous writing! When I could bear conjecture no more, I asked him quietly and sympathetically, "What are you reading, Jack?"

The absorbed attention hardly relaxed enough to answer; then he said—

"'Notes on Bilge Disinfection.'"

I was cast down, but should not have been surprised. If he *had* been reading Browning, his final comment might still have been "Bilge!"

To go back to the thought before last, Jack's groceries consisted of all the nicest things we know of, in tins or jars—beginning with Caviare, and going on with many more I had never heard of, such as Euchred figs; but no doubt Jack would know all about them, I thought.

The crew and I were commissioned to get to Lamlash, and the others would join us there, as it is a good starting-place for going round the

Mull of Cantyre, which we intended to do, instead of going through the paint-rubbing, temper-straining canal.

To me this seemed a high adventure! Just myself and a crew! Pretending it was all an everyday matter is not merely protective colouring: it adds to the inside joy in the unusual. If one let it come to the surface it might ooze through and evaporate!

It was a glorious day, with a nice amateur breeze, and everything went so beautifully I could not help wondering what would be found to be wrong! I do not mean I feared the jealous gods—a half day's sail is within the permitted dole of human happiness!—but I feared the White Knight's first inspection of us! The boat *seemed* to me to have the usual number of sails and ropes; but I had learned by now enough to know that merely looking all right was a small matter, and somehow the new Skipper's inevitable "Yess, yess," had ceased to reassure me. Then even if our zeal could no respite know (and I was conscious of having taken several respites from *Skeletta*), could a White Knight's tender care cease towards—his precious yacht?

At Lamlash we anchored quite close to the pier, which Duncan assured me was the right place, though to me both the bottom and the incoming steamers seemed too close. When the

steamer with our people on board arrived, they passed within speaking distance, and I tried to believe that some of the open ecstasy of Jack's expression was meant for me! I leant negligently against the boom, and waved to them, and tried not to look as conscious as I was of all the interested passengers, while remembering very clearly what a charming picture *Skeletta* makes as one approaches her like that. How all the people on board must be admiring her and envying me! One second more and they probably did neither, for *Skeletta* suddenly rolled violently to the too-near steamer's waves, and I had to clutch the boom in my arms to keep my balance, and she and I together must have looked like an absurd mechanical toy! I am really sorry for *Skeletta* when she suffers the indignity of being rolled. In herself she is so dignified, and her movements when sailing so graceful in the roughest sea, that it is an insult and a libel on her when her anchored peace is rudely disturbed. Incidentally my own native dignity and grace suffered a little too!

Our dinghy, with both men, had gone to fetch the Owner and his guests, and returned less saucily than she went, for her ten feet of length is taxed rather heavily with five grown men in her. We had not noticed that last year when we paddled our own canoe, but a crew, though

a fine thing to have, is inconveniently corporeal. The Don said something about her being rather low in the water.

"Not a bit of it," Jack at once asserted. "She can stand lots more than this—see how much freeboard she still has!" And he put his hand over to demonstrate, and the water rushed up his sleeve like an inverted waterfall.

"Yes; I do see," said the Don quite gravely, not dryly, except in the literal sense.

Jack leaped up our flight of two steps to the deck, and with a perfunctory marital sort of kiss, said, "How are you? Glad to see you," and so on; and then in a tone of real interest, and almost forceful inquiry, "But, my dear girl, what on earth have you done to her bowsprit?"

It would have been misplaced frivolity to have answered, "I haven't touched the beastly thing." Besides, I was puzzled. What could be wrong with her bowsprit? A fellow feminine feeling with *Skeletta* made me wonder if she had forgotten to rub the powder off her nose. We went to the bows, and gazed at the feature under discussion. It still seemed all right to me, and I rather foolishly said so.

"All right?" exclaimed *Skeletta's* owner scornfully. "Oh, it's all right, all right; only it's not her's."

The Skipper was summoned from aft, where he was being peculiarly assiduous in his supervision of Peter's efforts with the luggage. To get any information out of Duncan beyond "Yess, chust so," it required the laborious methods of the animal, vegetable, or mineral game. But at last we got the facts—or as many as Duncan considered good for us. Another yacht, whose skipper was a friend of his, had broken her bowsprit when racing, and as we were not using ours "chust at the time," *Skeletta's* bowsprit was now adorning the unlucky yacht—and "Where on earth did this come from?" growled the outraged Owner.

"I do not chust rightly know the name, but they were saying she would not be fitting out this year, whatefer; yess, yess, that is how it iss."

Jack was not soothed by this account of fair exchange, but more afraid of being accused of robbery.

"Nice thing for us if we met the man the beastly spar does belong to, and we can't explain, and he will suppose we helped ourselves to it. Damn!"

This rather clouded the happy home-coming, but supper was just ready, and was calculated to soothe the savage breast. The final touch was to be Euchred figs. When this novelty

appeared in a dish, I asked Jack if he knew about them, and he said no, not exactly, but they looked all right in their glass—" and how about some of that Devonshire cream with them while it's still fresh ? "

" A most succulent suggestion," the Don said, and the Youth opened it with such a zest of acquiescence that it spurted over everything else as well.

Jack was the first to begin, as I was busy serving, and the Don is always behind anyhow—at the moment he was fishing under the table for his elusive table-napkin. The Don's knees seem either more sloping or more slippery than other people's.

" Well, Jack," I asked, " what's the verdict ? "

" Oh, quite interesting," he answered without enthusiasm.

Just as I was getting a nice layer of cream over mine the Don leaped to his feet, looked wildly towards the door, but, seeing his exit barred by the Youth's large person, buried his face in his recovered napkin and groaned. I was horribly alarmed, and thought of fits and ptomaines and mere—*mal-de-mer.* But Jack's conduct was even more surprising than the Don's—he was prostrate too, but with laughter, not loud but deep ! The stricken Don looked up.

"I owe madame an apology—but 'a fool would have swallowed it.'"

Jack's Euchred figs turned out to be pickled!

I looked at the bottle they had come out of, but no warning was to be seen—only the remains of the figs, which looked deceptively attractive. Truly we see in a glass darkly!

It was a horrid waste of cream!

X.

Our start next day did not seem notably different to the crewless efforts of the year before. Peter had ample weight to apply to a rope, but not much notion which rope to apply it to, and Duncan was so busy trying to maintain his dignity as Skipper against the onslaughts of Jack's knowledge that he was not very efficient either, and the dual control made matters no easier for the amateur portion of the crew. Having the Youth there gave me the pleasing feeling of a schoolboy beginning his second term watching the miseries and mistakes of the new boys! But not being a boy, I had some compassion on my successor, and did my best to "put him wise," and, above all, head him off any levity over serious matters.

When the chain was being wound in, he was told off to stand in the very nose and sluice water over the incoming chain lest the mud of Lamlash contaminate the decks.

"Higher up, man!" shouted Jack.

" Throw it harder, can't you," adds the Don ; and a bucketful of filthy water cascades along the deck, Jack dancing in it like a bear, the Don stationary and soaked, and coffee-like grounds are deposited in swirls all down *Skeletta's* sacred fore-deck ! Oh, for the sea-boots of a crewless life ! Alas ! for the white shoes of mere conceit !

" Get aft," growls Jack, " and see if you can make fast the dinghy without sinking it."

I was at my womanly work of " stowing below," and too absorbed in my irremediable tendency to forget something, to help or comfort the Youth. I never quite get used to either the beginning or end of a sail—getting under way and anchoring are both jobs to me filled with acute anxiety and undefined danger. The unforgivable sin is to ask unnecessary questions at the time, and if I ask them afterwards the reconstruction of the circumstances and the " ifs and ands " enlighten me no more than the post-mortems on bridge hands. But I have gradually discovered that the safest job is to be at the helm—it looks nice and showy doing the steering ; but there is only a small selection of things one can do wrong—whereas the number of wrong ropes one can let go seems legion.

Jack had commiseration enough not to expect the Youth to know the main halyards and purchases, but for some reason I have not yet

fathomed any fool is supposed to know the topping-lifts by instinct. Just as we got off he was shouted to, "Let go the topping-lifts, Sandy." Unfortunately he chose the peak. The Don at the same moment obeyed the order instead, and I leaped out of the cockpit with a yell, as the sail seemed about to envelop me. My deplorable lack of nerve served better than a gallant but unenlightened seizing of the tiller, for the intelligent *Skeletta* at once came into the wind and waited for further orders. I did not join the happy throng round the mast, as the sail was hoisted again, and the wretched Sandy tried to look composed, in spite of his tomato complexion. I said to Jack later that my heart ached for the poor Youth's discomfiture and even the Don's well-meant officiousness.

"It's lucky he didn't make your head ache even more," was all the sympathy Jack expressed.

It was a day of stern initiation for the wretched Sandy! The next little thing to happen was when we cleared the southern entrance to Lamlash, and were heading south, the wind well aft the beam. Sandy was sitting beside me, and I was instructing him in the first elements of steering. Although I know much less about sailing than Jack, I am all the better fitted to teach, being near enough the level of my pupil

to be neither pained nor horrified at his ignorance. Presently Jack shouted—

"Let out some more main-sheet!" and I told Sandy what to do, this being a good first-step lesson. He unwound it off the cleat with conscientious alacrity, anxious to retrieve his character.

"Don't take *all* the turns off," I warned him, "or you won't be able to hold it—keep a round-turn——" I had not time to finish. The rope ran through his hands like the driving-band of a machine, and to stop it by hand was impossible. We were both hypnotised by the disaster, and gazed at the rapidly increasing space between the sail and the yacht, and then the worst happened. The rope ran on and on —untold fathoms of it, and—there was no knot at the end! So through the blocks it ran—till it fell helpless in the water, and *Skeletta's* mainsail was flapping forward like a broken wing. Sandy admitted to me later that thoughts of suicide came to him.

But—

> "What seem to us but sad funereal tapers,
> May be Heaven's distant lamps,"

or, in a prose version, that missing knot was not so much Sandy's complete undoing, as we had feared, but his saviour. Jack's owner pride

was so shocked by this dereliction of duty on the part of the hired menials that a mere blunder by a youthful amateur went almost unrebuked. Several things were said, and in all forms, as the dislocated wing was reduced. Oh, crew! to a crew, by, with, and from a crew! But Sandy was merely invited to go below before he brought the mast down, or . . .

The blame might be publicly bestowed on the crew, for the knot that was not; but I really felt I was the most to blame myself for having fallen into the objectionable habit of being technical in the wrong place. "A round-turn" is not a very advanced lesson in the sea-phrase book, but it was further than Sandy had got, who not unnaturally thought if the rope were round the cleat at all, it was "a round-turn." It wasn't: it was a disaster!

This ought to be the end of that day's misfortunes, but truth compels me to state that it was not. Horror was heaped on horror with a dreadful inevitableness, and *all* concentrating on the innocent Sandy, till he must have felt like the victim in a Greek tragedy.

Jack had come aft with some information for the Youth's guidance, when suddenly his eyes glazed, and the words literally died upon his lips—the only language he could have used being unutterable; but the Don followed his

stricken gaze, and said "Gadzooks" with a solemnity that made that absurd word quite awful. I almost thought Sandy *had* preferred suicide to sailing, and I also wheeled round from the helm to see what dreadful sight was in our wake. It was the dinghy—but no longer attached to us! It was bobbing along, with the painter hanging over the bows, as cheerful and independent as a puppy dragging a captured leash. Catching her again was even worse than recapturing an errant puppy! The manœuvre was most masterly in its handling, and every one was so anxious to efface the memory of the previous contretemps that they obeyed Jack's stern decrees with naval-like precision. This was a time when doing the steering was not the easiest job, and I felt I should round off the episode by sinking the dinghy, so Jack took it himself, and I stood by and looked alert and intelligent instead.

We got the little creature all right, but she bit and scratched the paint a trifle as she was captured, and the anxious culprit got a thumb cut open and nearly squashed flat by holding the dinghy by the gunwale with a thumb outside, which is a form of immolation dear to the tyro, but which one soon learns to avoid. In this instance, it was only justice, and if by splitting all the other fingers Sandy could have wiped out

the incident, no doubt he would have shed blood freely.

The Don and I took it in turn to instruct the Youth in the primary knots after that. Jack was sulking in his tent—I mean reading in the cabin,—and with that disapproving eye removed from him the Youth recovered with amazing rapidity, and even became rather frivolous. Jack was also recovering with a quickness rather more surprising, and came on deck to comfort and forgive the culprit. Unfortunately it was just at that moment Sandy chose to say—

"All this talk of 'bights and hitches' makes me feel tickly all over."

Jack's benevolent paterfamilias expression changed, and he went below again.

I had only once been round the Mull before, and not in a sea like this, and found it very different from most of our coasting cruises. The big Atlantic swell comes in broken by nothing nearer than America, and it is a most exhilarating business climbing up and up the rollers, to swoop down the other side, while the oncoming one seems to be advancing to one's certain destruction. But having surmounted a few, and never merely gone through them, as I half feared, the feeling of strangeness goes, and nothing but the joy of big movement

and big space is left. Still, I rather liked to think we were doing something great, and said to the Don—

"Going round the Mull can be rather dangerous —I mean literally dangerous; can't it?"

"Did you say littorally or literally?" he answered. "If the first, yes; if the second, perhaps."

This took more thinking out than was worth while at the moment; it was more exciting to be told by Jack that both littorally and literally we were now closer to Ireland than Scotland.

We caught our tides with a success which always savours to me of coincidence, but we had to beat up the west coast of Cantyre. Although it *is* the west coast, it has none of the characteristics of that damp but beautiful region; it is as low and sandy and uninteresting as the east coast of Scotland, its beauties being more apparent on shore, I suppose, where the golfer pursues his peculiar vocation—or, rather, vacation.

We had started with spacious views of the passage we would make. Even the White Knight had forgotten to think out *probable* misfortunes, and we had hopes of running right on to Oban; what is a night's sail with a regular crew? But the *improbable* mishappenings of the day had undermined Jack's unusual opti-

mism, and he gloomily explained we would be safer at anchor, and that we would put into Gigha. Duncan put forward a variety of reasons why this would not be a good plan at all. It was not a good anchorage, he said. Jack read aloud the chapter for the day from the Sailing Directions, and that reason was disposed of. It would be a peety, he contended, not to make a good passage while we had the wind. Jack ungratefully replied he did not consider a head wind a suitable one for a passage. Duncan doggedly went on—

"And then there iss no Past A*a*ffice, and the chentlemen will not be getting their newspapers or letters."

So unexpected an objection, and such solicitude for our minor comforts, awoke Jack's suspicions. With Machiavellian strategy he said nothing at the moment, but presently began examining the water-beakers—then sounding the water-tanks—and then asked, not the Skipper, who was eyeing him uneasily, but Peter, who is too stupid to lie—

"You don't seem to have any water—did you not fill up at Lamlash?"

Peter merely grinned. Jack continued his catechism—

"How much bread have you got?"

An even sheepier grin was the only answer,

but really none was needed. The Skipper, and many of his West Highland breed, seem to put courtesy and amiability far in advance of so crude a virtue as truthfulness, and are more anxious to say what pleases than to state unattractive facts. Duncan knew we were anxious to start at once when the others arrived; so when Jack asked if they had plenty of water on board, and all their own provisions, he soothingly assured him that "Yess, yess; that is quite right," knowing quite well he had neither the one nor the other, but that his questioner had no wish to hear any such answer. It would seem a short-sighted policy, but I suppose, like many improvidents, they trust "the Lord will provide"—and certainly in cruising the unexpected so often happens that they are almost as likely to go undetected as to become provisionless.

"We shall anchor behind Gigulum," said Jack, coming aft with the chart to where I was steering.

"I thought the island's name was Gigha," I said.

"So it is, only Gigulum is a small island off it. Duncan is nervous because the Sailing Directions say, 'Strangers should not try to make this anchorage, but pass to westward of the island'; but then I am not a stranger, and *Skeletta* is both smaller and handier than the

craft the Sailing Directions are written for. But these professional skippers object to the less-known anchorages, and like to be near a pub. and their pals. I shall go and try and explain the place to him now, but I don't believe he understands a chart any better than Sandy does."

The Don now wandered up from below.

"Well, where are we under orders for?" he asked.

"To an anchorage behind Gigulorum—no, Gigulis . . . or Gigula . . . or . . . anyhow, it's some name like that—I know it reminded me of my first—and only—Latin Grammar!"

Jack had reappeared with the inevitable chart as we talked, and the Don thought it best to inform himself first-hand of our destination.

"Ah—Gigulum is, I perceive, the name. I follow, although haltingly, what you mean about the Latin Primer, but I am afraid the impression left on you by that admirable work was more painful than accurate."

Jack was not following, even haltingly; he is so sure suchlike conversation leads nowhither, and was concentrating his attention more usefully on the doings of the long-legged dividers in his hand as they staggered over the chart.

Nothing of any note happened at the Gigha-

Gigulum anchorage, only that it poured without intermission all night, and the crew, while watering laboriously at a burn, must have absorbed enough moisture to prevent their feeling thirsty for a week. Jack said the punishment fitted the crime, but tempered justice with a glass of rum apiece before they turned in. This was duly swallowed at the cabin-door with a solemn toast: "Sweethearts and wives"—or was it "*or* wives"? I forget.

The rain managed to find a few weak places in *Skeletta's* decks, and produced most irritating drips in the cabin-roofs. I had one over my bunk; the Don's toes attracted another; and a third was in the open groceries' locker, and had filled the butter-dish and soaked the sugar. As soon as the rain stopped, so did they, but not so the White Knight! With a concoction of the evilest smelling stuff, he prowled about the decks all morning, smearing the seams with what looked and smelt like melted goloshes, and sternly forbade any one to walk on the innumerable lines and patches he made, till moving about the deck was like passing a test for sobriety.

It was a dull gusty day, well enough for actual sailing, but the colour had been washed out of the sea and land and sky as though with a wash of grey, making it seem a different

world from the jewelled brilliance with which it is sometimes set.

I find an occasional dull day rather a relief, for then one can turn one's whole attention to all the dull things that have to be done, but which waste a really fine day. There are always "chores," even with a crew; for although last year, when we had none, a crew seemed to me the solution of all earthly troubles, in point of fact they are not, and I don't suppose even the best of them would do the darning and the letter-writing. I am generally the one to want to sail for the mere pleasure of sailing, irrespective of the place arrived at; but the weather left me uninterested, so with no nagging wife to push him farther, Jack decided to make a short day of it and anchor before reaching Crinan at Carsaig Bay. The White Knight's weather instruments were all in a depressed mood, and he thought a look at the official forecasts would be useful. It is quite touching the faith Jack has in these prophecies, even after years, especially when they foretell evil. He would have been a perfect blessing to Cassandra.

The Skipper was not much more pleased with Carsaig than with Gigha, and when we anchored there I was not surprised—I only wondered where Jack expected to find a newspaper, for there was nothing to be seen but one house and

a few cottages and limitless hillside. As Jack explained once more, if I would only occasionally study the chart instead of merely talking, I would see that Loch Sween is just half a mile across the hill, and Tayvallich is its capital. Jack hates going ashore—he and *Skeletta* have always so many little things to do together,—so the rest of us were rowed ashore by Peter. At last the crew would get their daily bread, water having proved the only product of Gigulum.

It began to rain again as we walked over to Tayvallich, and the wind, which had been fairly strong before, began to come with those sudden howls which always make me wish I were going to sleep in a solid fixture of a house, and not jiggling about at the end of an anchor-chain. We began telling the Youth of our efforts to telegraph to Greenwich for the weather, and he thought it would be an excellent idea to do it again now, just to see how *this* post-office would cope with the matter.

"That was all very well while we were at Crinan," I objected, "but how could we get the answer in the middle of Carsaig Bay, even supposing an answer ever arrived?"

This, he had to admit, was a difficulty. But just then we passed the gates of a decent-looking house, and the Youth had a bright idea.

"Why not ask the people here to take in the

answer, and then we can send a man ashore for it ? "

I was slightly diffident about making any such suggestion to the unknown inmates of an unknown house, but eighteen-years-old is not so shy.

" Oh, I'll arrange it in a brace of shakes," and he turned and left the Don and me, dubious and wet, at the gate.

The Don spoke—

" Our state of mind is, I imagine, what is implied by the Scotch term ' blate,' though why a nation so little troubled with the defect should have a special word for it, I do not know."

The unblate Sandy now returned, whistling, looking pink and pleased.

" That's all right. They're going to take it in all right."

Tayvallich, even in rain, is a dear little place, with a very comfortable-looking anchorage, invitingly so in comparison to Carsaig, which to my unpractised eye seemed rather too open for comfort, if not for safety. We all voted to try and get Jack to bring *Skeletta* into Loch Sween, although it would be a much longer way for her than our short walk across. The post-office proved disappointingly enlightened, and accepted our shilling and our instructions with complete urbanity. Tayvallich, being rather

a resort of sailing yachts, may account for their knowledge, but I doubt it. I find it difficult to believe that any one but Jack and a brother White Knight in the Meteorological Office, who invented the idea, ever thought of telegraphing for the " probable weather."

We got back on board about tea-time after a really battling walk in wind and rain. The dinghy in a choppy sea is a bustling, spluttering, little creature, and managed to make us even wetter than we were. Tea, which we all professed to scorn when we had to boil, set, and wash-up ourselves, had become a pleasing enough institution, with a slave in the fo'c'sle to produce it. But this time I did not appreciate it quite as much as I had expected to do while we tramped in the rain. *Skeletta* had become infected with Jack's uneasiness about the weather and the low views of the graphs and meters, and she was fidgeting about in a manner which quite took my attention off the rather rich cakes, which are the only ones which stand a sea life. Also, Jack's golosh-solution seemed to permeate the atmosphere in a nauseating way. Sandy managed the cake and ignored the smell, as was suitable at his age, but even he seemed to be off smoking.

I retired to " rest " in the after-cabin for a little. How I hate the gradually increasing

row which precedes a storm! Everything bangs and rattles! The halyards smack against the mast, and even when they are lashed to the shrouds, some other thing always manages to smack something else; and even the little bottles in the lockers clap their hands. Then the bobstay makes the most hideous and ominous noises as the waves raise it up and down against the anchor-chain, with the same effect as a guttersnipe rattling a stick along railings, only that in a boat the sound is magnified, and echoes and reverberates in a devastating manner. Then there is a particularly ghostly "wouff" in the rigging when a squall hits the boat that makes me lose a heart-beat every time.

I lay on my berth thinking on the pleasures of going down, even a little way, to the sea in ships, when the bobstay and chain suddenly gave forth a noise which utterly surpassed any previous effort, and the whole boat shook with a sickening quivering feeling! As I leapt to my feet—all thought of possible sickness lost in the thought of imminent shipwreck—I heard "alarums and excursions, off," which were interpreted as usual by the unseen crowd all shouting at once. I could not rush on deck, for the excellent reason that the others were doing so, and as my door is also the companion, it is not easy to open with a grown man climbing

up it. But even the Don got up quickly on this occasion, and I was set free to follow. I had to clutch the boom for support when I did reach the deck, for *Skeletta* was rolling hysterically, and the queer grinding noise continued. Sandy was the only unoccupied unit, and was clinging to the shrouds.

"What on earth has happened?" I shouted through the various noises, human and natural.

"Don't know—gone aground, I think."

If that were so, we must be pivoting on our keel in a manner to produce immediate disintegration! Whatever was happening at the bows seemed to make a scrum round the anchor-winch, and the little Don soon got squeezed out of it, and, having anxiously surveyed the rear elevation of the rest for a few moments, staggered back towards us.

"Have we gone aground?" I howled in competition with the wind.

Through *Skeletta's* jazz concerto of noises, the Don's precise diction cut through everything else like a solo instrument—

"Au contraire, madame; the anchor has left it."

The scrum at the winch suddenly broke up, and the play became more open, so to speak.

"No good," shouted Jack; "she won't hold —must get some sail on her. Hurry up, man"

(to the Don). "Get out of that" (this to Sandy), "and pull in this rope—no, not *that* one! Oh, go and help some one else!"

It occurred to me at this point that it was pouring, so as I am not a hauler but a mere steerer, there was a moment to spare to get an oily. Needless to say, the others had neither coats nor the time to get them.

By now it was getting dusk, and nothing less attractive could be imagined than setting forth in that rain-swept bay, full of white horses, with worse outside, where they came from. No sooner was the mainsail more or less up, than a squall of extra viciousness struck at it and heeled us over till the lee gunwale was buried. Again and again this happened. As soon as the poor quivering boat tried to gather way she was smacked flat, and we just drifted helpless. Then Jack abandoned the mainsail altogether, and hoisted the foresail to try her with that. I remember we sailed into the Crinan sea-lock once with only foresail, and all went beautifully; but this was a different matter. The wind no longer laid us flat, but the waves snubbed and checked *Skeletta's* every effort, and still we drifted helpless out into the bay. To say Jack had got the wind up sounds as if he were, witch-like, responsible for the gale, but I own I was surprised to see him obviously

acutely anxious. There seemed a great deal of room still before we went ashore on the other side; but the real reason became suddenly obvious to me, even without the chart, which I had not studied.

"Sandy!" I gasped; "look!"

All round us the waves were breaking white, but for the first time I saw a patch of breakers —seething white, just astern,—and in the low hollows between waves, jagged and black, a line of rocks.

"No time to reef, man!" came Jack's angry roar in answer to some misplaced suggestion. He was just behind us tying something round the sail; then up went the peak of the mainsail only, and Jack dashed at the tiller, and bellowed at the men, now almost unseen in the darkness. To me he said—

"Take off your coat; if she doesn't go about this time, we're done, and the dinghy will be smashed as well."

I obeyed, filled with a sort of interested surprise that real danger—not merely "strafs" —should touch so holiday a matter as *Skeletta*. Just then the sail stopped banging and cracking, and over we went, gunwale under—but sailing! Then, like a silver clarion, rung the accents of the Don's well-known tongue—

"A somewhat narrow squeak—eh, what?"

Once outside the bay we got the full force of the sou'-wester which was responsible for our eviction. We ran before it in the dark and rain to Crinan, where the harbour, though small, is at least sheltered. By now, as might be supposed, we were all soaked to the skin, and, with the wind blowing it in, it seemed to me we must be wet even through it.

The worst of Crinan is that one comes on it so suddenly from the south, and going, as we were, like a destroyer after so nearly being the destroyed, there was no time to take in what boats were anchored there, but just round up amongst them, and let down the anchor with a run, trusting to good luck in default of good guidance. But I must not deny Jack some iota of skill as well as luck, for with his lynx-eyes he can, and did, see more or less where he was going, while the rest of us were still trying to make out what lights were what. The sudden midnight arrival and rattle of anchoring chain brought the crews of the sleeping boats tumbling on deck. But after a few halloos and answers we and they decided that we were not actually going to bump any of them, and they disappeared again.

The first thing to do was to change and get hot drinks. Sandy, being only a super on deck, got the cabin free for his reclothing, while the

Don conscientiously helped Jack, and I, of course, had my own ; but when I began to boil milk and make cocoa in the main cabin, the Don had not where to carry out his toilette ! Jack had his " dressing-room," but as that requires almost a conjurer's skill to manage in, even for one, no invitation to the Don was forthcoming, and he stood in the doorway looking like an unwanted cat that has been unsuccessfully drowned.

" Take your things into the after-cabin, my poor Don," I suggested.

My hot drinks were soon going, for the fo'c'sle and ourselves—only the Don was late, as usual.

" I'll go and see which of his garments he's lost," said Jack, " and he can cover any deficiencies with his bath-towel."

It was soon obvious why the Don had found dressing difficult. After I had changed, Jack had hauled up the boards in the after-cabin to get some extra chain that was stowed there, and had not had time to replace them. The Don, poor dear, never thought of doing so, but had accepted the state of my cabin with unquestioning resignation, and had tried to dress striding over the cavernous hole like a miniature Colossus ! Poor dear ! He drops enough

things about, even when there is a floor to catch them; but with a deep damp bilge between his feet, the wonder is he ever got clothed at all.

When we were all sitting in that blissful state of fedness and glow that comes with peace after toil, port after stormy seas, I wondered aloud what would happen about the telegram we were to have called for.

"The inhabitants of that lonely house will be more intrigued than ever," I said. Sandy grinned.

"They will," he said, positively smacking his lips. "For I made it sound as mysterious as I could, just to make it more interesting for them, and the nice old girl I arranged it with positively blinked with excitement when I said we would send a man for the answer; 'but not till after dark!'"

"How could you be such an idiot, Sandy?" I exclaimed.

"Well, it *would* have been after dark before we sent, you know. And I do think it was only decent to give them something for their trouble, and I couldn't tip her, you know. It will keep them happy for days."

I have often wondered how long the good ladies kept that telegram, and whether they then

opened it or communicated with the police. What a horrid anticlimax to one's first real detective adventure to find the "probable weather" for some specified days long past!

Though we never got the telegram, we certainly got the weather!

XI.

JACK'S clothes were a real worry to me! Goodness knows! he had enough of them, quite three times as much as I had. He had suits and shirts of varying thicknesses and shades to suit every weather condition—cold fine weather, cold wet weather, warm bright weather, warm dull weather! Having once accepted the unalterable fact that his luggage would fill an ark, let alone a small yacht, and even managed to stow the stuff away—*that* was not my complaint. What I found hard to bear was that, with all this wardrobe to choose from, he never appeared in anything but the perfectly dreadful remnants of a tweed suit and a Shetland sweater of dubious colour. The rest were "in case" the weather conditions required them; but, like the White Queen's jam, it was always yesterday or to-morrow, but never the necessary weather to-day.

The Don needs severe feminine supervision at any time in the matter of clothes, so with

Jack's awful example and none of his own womankind, he degenerated rapidly, but more from want of thought than want of heart, and appeared in whilom tennis trousers and an aged Norfolk jacket, which, I fancy, is an heirloom. Sandy, being young and ignorant, had irreproachable yachting clothes.

The Don's feet were a constant worry to him —and others. He seemed always to have on sea-boots when we landed for a walk, yet on coming on board he had frequently to be helped across the deck because he had nails in his shoes.

The day after our midnight arrival at Crinan the wind was still howling and blustering from the south-west, a point of the compass which seems to contain the main supply of wind. Jack, of course, wanted to stay where we were ; to leave a good anchorage merely to go out into a sou'wester, for no special reason, was what he calls " a mug's game." A mug is evidently a person who thinks differently from oneself, as far as I can gather from Jack's frequent, but diverse, use of the expression. I have a soft spot for the mug myself, as it is always towards the side of fun and games that the poor thing errs, and he seems to have very little serious sense of responsibility.

Sandy and I decided to back the mug

this time, and Jack gave in to a certain extent.

"I shall certainly not go outside the Dorus Mor in this weather," said Jack, with immense dignity and decision; "but if you must always be on the move when there is more than enough to do where we are—well, we can go into Loch Craignish."

"Thank you, papa," I said humbly.

This journey took us about an hour; an hour's sailing, of course, I mean—there is always the great untimed period of starting and stopping! Jack washed his hands of us, and let us play our little game with the mug as we chose. But his detachment was not as complete as the pretence of it, for he bobbed on deck from time to time to verify various cross-bearings he had made for some far-sighted reason.

Craignish is one of the loveliest lochs in the west, but it is not very extensive, so we were up to the head and round the islands which divide it into two arms all too soon, and the prospect of anchoring at once was rather dull.

Fortunately, Jack's soul is not so flatly sensible as his pronouncements, so with the sun shining and the tide obviously in our favour, he, like us, could not resist the chance to go out through

the Dorus Mor and try our luck farther north ; but as beseems a serious skipper in charge of irresponsible amateurs, he gave in with a show of reluctant yielding as though to spoilt and importunate children. But the great thing is that we went ; sailing and swirling up that giant mill-lade, which the always hurried tide makes in that narrow channel.

The geography just north of Craignish always puzzles me, for there is such a maze of little channels and little islands, and wider channels and bigger islands. Reference to the official log would, no doubt, give me our exact anchorage, but it is immaterial, for any little group of islands somewhere near the mainland thereabouts would seem much the same, as sheltered for the boat and as charmingly mild on a miniature scale, to look at.

Not far off on the mainland we could see what appeared to be a farm of fair size, so, the anchoring safely over, of course we wanted to go ashore and explore.

" Good Lord ! You can't be happy now you have moved, but must go ashore ! What do you want with a yacht at all, I wonder ? Your one idea always seems to be leaving it ! "

I tactfully suggested we might get some fresh provisions at the farm. So sensible a proposition rather placated Jack, and the dinghy was ordered

round to the front door. I have not yet got over the delightful novelty of this dignified proceeding! Such an improvement to hauling the thing up oneself, scrambling in off the counter, and trying to eliminate one's feet till the baling is finished.

The farmer's wife welcomed us with charming Highland hospitality, more as if we were expected guests than stray strangers. I asked if we might have some eggs and butter, even a chicken, perhaps? Oh, yess—she would see about it if we would wait in the parlour. Scotch farm parlours are sometimes a little awesome in their ugliness. The air has an almost sepulchral feeling, from the lack of use and open windows, and ranged around stiffly are photographs of stiff self-conscious relatives in unaccustomed clothes, with expressions of grim endurance—I suppose they knew the result would be forever entombed in the best parlour! This room was delightfully different, and without the least feeling of a recently removed corpse! A spinning-wheel, obviously for use, not ornament, was by one side of the fire, and by the other a table with mending and knitting—and books; these also for use, not ornament, which seemed more surprising even than the spinning-wheel. The Don cannot be near a book without picking it up, and as I was examining the

wheel he almost shouted with surprise and pleasure—

"By my halidom, these are unexpected books to find in a lonely farm! Their titles read like the Hundred Best Books, chosen by some one who really meant to read them—and they *have* been, by Jupiter!"

"Perhaps they belong to lodgers," I guessed.

"Not much," said Sandy; "look at this."

And there, on many of the fly-leaves, was the name of the farmer himself, and his certificates and prizes from the University where he had taken a degree! Unlike Voltaire's God, if this were not true one could not invent it, for it was such pure Barrie as to be rank plagiarism.

Sandy groaned. "O Lord! I am off! Reading these sorts of things is bad enough at college, and living in a farm like this bad enough at any time—but, O ye gods! fancy combining them for pleasure! I'm off to explore—I really can't stick this; when the good lady returns, I suppose, you will talk philosophy, interlarded with pig—fare-thee-well!" And he tiptoed out of the house, and then escaped, whistling.

The lady of the house soon returned with a large basket of eggs, butter, and wonderful home-made scones, still warm from the girdle, and oatcakes as thin and curled as autumn leaves.

"I have got a chicken and two young ducks I could let you have, but I will send them down to the yacht, as they have still to be plucked."

I said it was exceedingly kind of her, as our man was not very equal to dealing with anything less prepared for cooking than a slice of bacon. At that she offered to cook the birds for us as well, and when she added that it would be easy, as they had the fresh herbs in the garden, the Don intervened and thanked her elaborately, but from the heart—I suppose "heart" is the right expression!

I asked about the spinning-wheel, a thing I have never seen working, except in 'Faust' and 'The Yeomen of the Guard,' when the vocal preoccupations of the spinner seemed detrimental to the spinning, for the wheel generally goes as much backwards as forwards! Mistress Farmer offered to teach me if we were staying a little longer at the anchorage.

"I should be much interested," to her surprise the Don, not I, answered; "spinning is an art that much intrigues me."

His short-sighted peering at it, and his long tentatively poking finger, seemed to intrigue the owner of the wheel too! I said we would certainly come up next morning, when the light was better, if she could spare us some time.

When we got back on board we found the

restless Sandy had explored enough thereabouts, and wanted to row round the point, which certainly looked attractive, and where Donald told us there was a path across the hills to a village. Jack grumphed—probably about the poor mug, I expect !—and, of course, he did not come.

"A boat's meant to sail in, not to walk from," was his parting benediction.

I mildly remonstrated that we had not suggested walking from Crinan, and he had been no better pleased then ; but the fact is, that Jack is like the people who keep sporting dogs as house-pets—he prefers petting *Skeletta* to sailing her !

What Donald had called a path proved to be a burn—it certainly was more water than path, and its firmest parts were bog. But it meandered up the hillside in most alluring manner, every few yards opening another fold in the hills ahead, and behind the whole coast became like a raised map at our feet. It was a truly wonderful view—the Paps of Jura to the south, and beyond them the dim low land of Islay. Right at our feet Loch Melfort, with its islands and the little *Skeletta*, a tiny floating object, in her little, little bay. Then, to the west and north, the high lonely eminence of Scarba and the hills above Loch Feochan,

which, like all these Scottish hills, look so much higher than they are, holding up their hundreds of feet of height with the dignity of many thousands.

The Don and I sat down before very long, just to fill our eyes with it all, and to watch the sun prepare to set in this wonderfully arranged amphitheatre. Sandy had stood about on one leg after another, saying at intervals, "Oh, rather! Awfully jolly! No end fine! Absolutely ripping!" till at last I released him. A sigh of relief, and he was off, bounding along like a large puppy. Eighteen is rather a wearing age, both to the owner and the onlooker! So deadly earnest and grown-up at one moment, so physically irrepressible the next.

When the sun had disappeared into its evening bath in the Atlantic, we turned to look for Sandy.

"He has probably scaled some adjacent mountain, not allowing for the necessary descent," the Don gloomily surmised.

But he was wrong. Sandy was up in the heights undoubtedly, but quite metaphorically. In person he was walking towards us, escorting a bare-legged girl! This may suggest a child of the mountains with a shawl across her shoulders and bare head, but it was not, by any means! The young person was just such as

one may meet in any afternoon's shopping in Glasgow or Edinburgh, most fashionably dressed, and the latest thing in hats, but the inevitable silk stockings and high-heeled shoes were in her hand, and not on her feet! The result was striking and unusual—quite unusually pretty, indeed!

There was "not a trace of diffidence or shyness" in the girl as she came up and spoke to us, and no doubt for the same reason as the moon's, "we really know our worth, the moon and I."

"One can't meet on a mountain pass and merely bow, can one? Still less on stepping-stones, balanced on one leg, as I was when we" (with a sidelong glance at Sandy) "met."

"Miss Cameron is going to that farm we were at this morning, and I thought we would take her round in the dinghy and save her a pretty rough walk. Can we?"

The answer was obvious.

In the boat, Miss Cameron proceeded with the utmost nonchalance to put the suede shoes to their more usual use, while explaining, as she pulled on long stockings to meet the not very long skirt—

"I've come from Aberdeen to-day—I'm at the 'Varsity there, worse luck!—and the motor broke down, so we were hours late, so I expect

my aunt thinks I'm not coming, so it's jolly lucky I met you, isn't it ? "

" The luck is ours," courteously replied the Don, and Miss Cameron's glance of frank amusement was received by the Don with a little bow, and I hope he did *not* catch the minx's aside to Sandy : " Isn't he *priceless !* "

We put the young lady ashore at her farm.

" So long, and thanks awfully ! " and she skipped on to the pier, while the Don was laboriously arranging to hand her out without jeopardising his own balance.

When we got back to *Skeletta* we found the crew sitting weeping at the bows, and Jack mopping up his tears at the stern !

" What *is* the matter ? " we asked in one affrighted chorus.

There was no answer from the red-eyed tearful Peter as he took the dinghy, though he did his best to smile ; the Skipper merely sniffed into his handkerchief. I hastened on board, more curious than anxious, for even had Jack imagined us all drowned, I did not fancy the crew would take it so to heart ; it was difficult to imagine what was the common factor of so much emotion. Jack did his best to make light of this burden of woe, for he dried his eyes and said bravely (it was really crossly,

but that is how strong men disguise their finest emotion)—

"There's nothing wrong at all—what should there be? But—perhaps you had better not go below just for a little."

What awful thing was there below which I must not see, and which made grown men weep?

"Jack, I *must* know what it is? Is some one dead down there?"

"Don't be absurd," was the sympathetic answer; "it's merely that I have been disinfecting the bilge; that book said formalin had no smell, and I know you hate *Skeletta* to reek of carbolic, so I put in plenty of this stuff, and——"

I lost the rest in a tornado of sneezes, for I was standing by the companion, and this tear-gas had just reached me. How misleading books are! The stuff has not exactly a smell certainly, but it has a *feel!* Even now, after much airing, it got into one's eyes and nose and throat; and when we *had* to go below and to bed, the ship resounded with coughs and sneezes and snuffles, like a ward of super colds-in-the-head. And Jack seemed determined to think it was all my fault for objecting to carbolic!

Next day was as beautiful as the previous ones had been bad, the colouring as brilliant as

Italy near at hand, but farther off the Scotch atmosphere, so much softer and more mysterious than clearer countries, changed the distant sea and hills to every gradation of blue and grey. Sandy had been up betimes—the formalin, he explained,—and had indulged in the admirable habit of a run ashore—most praiseworthy! In spite of this, he was also most *empressé* in his offers to go ashore again immediately after breakfast to get the milk—the—eh—the—eh—anything, in fact! Jack very tactlessly said the men would do that as usual, and that we had better get the sails up to air.

"The spinnaker needs an airing badly," he added, with serious looks.

I know that sail by sorrowful experience, but not by use. It lives in a bag, always in the most inaccessible part of the sail-locker, and on odd fine days which were invented expressly for sailing, Jack always has it out and hangs it up in billowy festoons to "air it!" Thank goodness, *Skeletta* has not so large a wardrobe as Jack would like to give her, or there would never be time to sail at all!

"No, Jack," I said firmly, "the Don and I have an engagement ashore—we are going to learn to spin. So you keep the men to help with the spinnaker, and Sandy will come with us and get the—milk."

The unsophisticated but grateful youth said thank you in such heartfelt tones that even Jack first wondered, and then understood. Those dim recollections of being eighteen were passing before him, I suppose.

"Rather a jolly life farming, I should think," remarked Sandy, as we climbed up from the shore to the farm. The cause of this change of opinion now appeared in a land-girl get-up of the most musical-comedy variety.

"Coming to milk the cows?" she asked the Don, after morning greetings to us all.

"Er—well—I am not proficient at that occupation. Like the man who had never played the violin, I am not even sure that I can, but——"

"Then Sandy can help instead," I interrupted, as that was obviously meant, and Sandy was without the aplomb necessary to the occasion. He would learn that from the young lady, if nothing else.

They went off cheerily, and the Don was left marvelling at the—

"Exchange of exclamations in the latest slang, which seems to pass for conversation even between supposedly educated young people."

"Yes," I agreed. "Youth's sweet-scented manuscript is written in a rather peculiar

idiom these days, but I daresay it reads all right to the initiated."

The spinning-class was undertaken by the old, old mother of the farm, her daughter-in-law having other things to attend to in the morning. Teaching a practical thing seems much more difficult than the most abstruse ones, perhaps because the teachers are themselves too practical to understand the art of teaching. What I have suffered from Jack in the matter of fishing, for instance! In this case, our teacher was also handicapped by her very imperfect knowledge of English and our complete ignorance of Gaelic. So she could only show us, leaving us quite unenlightened about our own faults at the end. Figure-skaters are just the same; they cheerfully offer to show you how to do a bracket or a rocker, or some such contortion, and say, "Look, it's like this," and nothing but an ultra-rapid camera would be any the wiser.

The Don likes to begin with theory, so he expounded what he imagined to be one; but I learn such things by rule of thumb, and this time I seemed to be all thumbs. The Highlander is like the Frenchman, full of gentle courtesy and insincere compliments on the outlandish efforts of the foreigner, whether to learn his arts or to speak his language.

" Fery goot, yess, yess—it is himself will be the fine spinner," the old lady would say, while examining the awful results we produced with her beautiful home-carded wool.

The Don's " thread " would have made an excellent hawser for *Skeletta,* and as for mine —it was like a chain of mutilated caterpillars ; thick hairy bits, connected by thin hairs, where they had apparently been trodden on ! The only thing more difficult than the spinning would be to knit with the abortions we produced !

The " young people " were seen through the window, busy doing nothing particular, so they were called in.

" Sheila ! Sheila ! come away ben and show the lady how to spin."

This was interpreted by Sheila a little differently. She came while the Don had his nose glued to the wheel, trying to rethread his oft-broken thread, and it was his wheel, not mine, she elected to teach on.

I gave up my efforts and talked to the old lady, whose conversation, fragmentary as it was, was more entertaining at least to me than Sheila's. That young woman was very conscious of the picturesque picture she made, sitting by the low window of the kitchen, the long bright thread evolving as though by magic between her hands, the slow graceful move-

ments showing off her shapely arm as well as playing the harp would! Her conversation was for the absorbed Don—her conscious unconsciousness for Sandy.

When he left to go back to lunch on board, the Don said to me with quite a little air of preening—

"Charming girl that, and most intelligent! She took the trouble to explain the whole business to me when many girls would have had no interest in either spinning or my not very youthful society—remarkably pretty pleasant creature."

"You quoted Kipling once to me," I said, "so I shall return the compliment now," and I quoted—

> "If she grow suddenly gracious—reflect,
> Is it all for thee?"

"I do not quite follow your allusion," said the Don, stiffly enough to show he had.

"Well, never mind—here comes Miss Sheila's real objective, and this 'correspondence must now cease.'" And Sandy, looking very young and very "grown-up," came up to us whistling the everlasting rag-time.

Sandy's enthusiasm for a farming life grew apace! Sheila took us round the whole place, explaining everything with an air of insouciance

which did not quite disguise her real knowledge, but gave her many opportunities to gibe at Sandy's ignorance.

She showed us the large cauldron in which the wool for spinning was being dyed with some local produce of lichen, heather-roots, and I forget what. The Don peered in at the steaming mass, which immediately dimmed his glasses, and he learnt little, but was anxious to seem knowledgable. He poked with his stick among a heap of undyed wool alongside.

"And this," said he, "is the well-known crottle dye, I presume?"

"This" was not: it was a yellow cat, which leapt to its feet and fled, its yell less expressive of amusement than ours! Soon we found ourselves—the Don and I—leaning over the pigsties, being instructed in the relative merits of Middle Whites and Berkshires, &c., but by the farmer; the other two had mysteriously disappeared, and were, no doubt, studying other sides of the Arcadian life elsewhere. When we went back on board we were loaded up with every kind of scone and bannock, for which it was not possible to offer payment.

Jack was champing to be off. We had all become so agricultural in the last twenty-four hours that he felt the only antidote was to get to sea. The Don and I agreed, but Sandy,

though too young and in too small a minority to speak, was obviously less keen to start. If one has just chosen a new profession, one, of course, wants to study it ; but I am afraid these considerations did not weigh with Jack, and the ship was under orders to start at tea-time. Sandy found he had lost something ashore, so might he go and look for it ? I thought it was time to laugh at him a little.

" If it's your heart, Sandy," I said, " I am pretty sure you have merely mislaid it, and if you ' leave it alone it'll come home ' none the worse for wear ! "

But he was very stiff and proud, and replied that, " It is my pipe, thank you." Poor boy ! his next most recently acquired manly possession !

Young men are dreadfully brittle ! That misplaced laugh of mine twisted his ankle ! The farmer rowed out to us, towing our dinghy, and explained the young gentleman had hurt himself, but that he could easily stay at the farm for a day or two, and join us at Oban by the motor. This was rather a predicament ! I felt morally responsible to the youth's mother. Would she like him to have a sprained ankle on the farm ? On the other hand, if it were a really truly sprain, how could we manage with him on board ? While I pondered these weighty

considerations, Jack had damned the young gentleman's idiocy, and thanked the farmer for his hospitality, and the anchor was coming up! Nothing remained but to pack the youth's hand-bag, and hope the strained heart would mend as easily as the ankle—the strained truth being beyond repair!

The prospect of going to Oban visibly brightened the crew, who obviously considered we overdid the "Tooral-looral" life.

"Oh, it's Oban that is the grand place!" said Donald.

"Aye, a fine place yon," piously added Peter.

The White Knight dashed their hopes once more! He elected to anchor in a little bay on the Kerrera shore, which is a long, long row across to Oban and its glittering delights. I mentioned this obvious drawback, forgetting for the moment that it is never the obvious consideration that actuates the White Knight!

"That is just why," he answered me triumphantly; "the men won't go and get drunk, as they almost certainly would in Oban, or, at least, they'll have a good deal of trouble to manage it."

Another obvious but unnoticed fact was that we also would have considerable difficulty in getting to Oban, even without the inducement of getting drunk!

We tied-up to an enormous buoy, which looked as if it would hold a liner in a gale. We found we could get a motor-boat from the yard at Ardentrive to take us across the bay once we had scrambled ashore and stumbled along half a mile of wet and knobbly ground; so, as Jack pointed out, *I* could not complain of inconvenience.

We dined at one of the many hotels which compose Oban, and forgathered with some old sailing friends whose yacht was lying nearer at hand than ours; in fact, close in to the station pier. Jack shook his far-seeing head.

"I wonder you find that satisfactory. I prefer to keep the men out of temptation, and they are enjoying each other's company over at Kerrera!"

It was, of course, quite dark before we got back to Ardentrive, and seemed to get darker at every jolting, slipping step we took towards *Skeletta*, whose twinkling anchor-light seemed a very will-o'-the-wisp to reach. At last we stumbled down the slippery, rocky shore abreast of her, and Jack hailed her—

"*Skeletta* ahoy!"

Complete silence.

"*Skeletta* ahoy!" in even more stentorian tones.

The very gulls rose uneasily, but from *Skeletta* —nothing!

"Men are just the same in ordinary houses," I said. "If one has to ring several times and wait lengthily, it is always a butler who eventually opens the door."

The Don now added his tenor tones to Jack's bass, and the hails were punctuated by many bass remarks anent *Skeletta's* silent crew. I sat down and waited on what I at first believed to be a dry stone, and smiled, like Patience, on the White Knight's grief, which was not virtuously difficult, for the two howling, cursing figures were really very funny. *Skeletta* remained silently aloof.

There was nothing for it but to stumble back to the yard and hunt for a shore-boat. They found several; but either they were without oars or without rowlocks, as others besides the White Knight had evidently thought out contingencies. But at long-last, while groping around, they found a confiding craft with oars complete and tholepins. They gave a shout, and I stumbled to join them, and with infinite labour we got the heavy boat into the water. She was a fishing-boat—only too evidently! One could almost see the smell! Jack's senses were all submerged in waves of wrath and vengeance, and a trifle like a smell would not worry him at

his calmest; but the Don sympathised, and spread his handkerchief for me to sit on. I think it is Browning who says something about action prompted by anger never betokening strong will—but it does lend strong muscle! Jack's rage vented itself in rowing his one oar with a fury the Don was quite incapable of equalising with his, so our progression was a series of swooping curves made by Jack, and laboriously straightened out by the perspiring Don, while Jack muttered curses at both him and the crew! As we got near, Jack said—

"They haven't wakened up so far, but, by the Lord, they're going to wake now!" And instead of coming up alongside carefully avoiding a touch on *Skeletta's* paint, he hauled the bows of our heavy, fishy boat to right angles with the side of the yacht.

"That's about where their beastly heads are," snarled Jack. "Now, pull all you're worth!" and our bows went crashing into *Skeletta's* defenceless shoulder with a thud that was meant to fracture the skulls inside! The result was unexpected. Jack was so intent on vengeance that the results of such a sudden jar to themselves was overlooked, and at the same moment as the punitive crash both he and the Don fell backwards off their thwarts into the fishy bottom of the boat! The crew remained undisturbed!

The two men disentangled themselves from each other and the oars; I got on board, and they followed, their best shore-going clothes glistening with fish-scales, like frosted Christmas cards! Jack strode to the fo'c'sle and turned on the light, and the so-far predominant odour of fish faded away before the mightier one of rum.

A sonorous sleep filled the air!

"Drunk!" muttered Jack; "where the devil did they get the stuff? for I've got the key of the wine-locker."

"Yes, but not of *this* locker!" I said, pointing to the "cocktail" shelf. A half-bottle of rum was gone, which was a natural enough seafaring tipple; but the deluded beings had gone on to the only other available alcohol—French Vermouth,—no doubt imagining it to be whisky! Then, depressed by the absence of body in this deceptive compound, they had finished with a bottle of sloe-gin!

"Poor devils!" murmured the Don; "it was the corked one!"

It's ill discussing matters with a drunk man, so it was agreed to let them sleep it off, and lecture and dismiss them next morning. Before turning in, the Don reminded me of my ill-omened wish for a "collapsible crew"! "The ironic gods must have heard, and ordained to 'make it so'!"

Events did not work out according to plan next morning. I woke early, and as I lay gazing idly at the skylight I saw go past the opening a section of a processional frieze of blue-trousered legs! It was so soundless, I almost thought I was dreaming; still I woke Jack, but it was impossible to get him awake enough for sense without shouting unduly.

"What's the matter?" he asked sleepily.

"I don't know that anything's the matter, only——"

"*That's* all right, then," he grunted, and rolled over to sleep again.

Then I was sure I heard oars.

"Jack, wake up! I'm sure I hear some one in the dinghy."

But all the answer I got was a muffled—

"I don't!"

So then I got out of bed and peeped up on deck. The dinghy was gone from the stern, likewise the fishy shore-boat, and about two hundred yards away there they were, being rowed by our collapsible crew! My howls of dismay brought up the now really wakened Jack and the Don as well.

They had looked funny enough the night before, when as dark figures they howled impotently on the shore; they were even funnier now, shouting and gesticulating on deck, clad

in pyjamas, and equally impotent! For once Jack's sartorial foresight was justified: nightly he had slept in inappropriate dark-blue garments, "in case" he should some day have to go on deck without dressing; but the Don, in choosing his night attire, had given free rein to an otherwise unsatisfied craving for colour, having reasonable hopes of seclusion, and now his gesticulations, in this flapping garb of many colours, were as decorative as the entire Merchant Service Code! The miscreants in the boat took not the slightest notice, unless it were to smile, but this they were fortunately too far off for us to see.

A hymn of hate having been sung in three parts, we went below and dressed, and I went back, or more literally for'ard, to my old job of getting breakfast.

Now arose the necessity of getting a new crew and meeting the returning Sandy; but the question was, how to get ashore! I was for calling to a neighbouring yacht, but Jack could not bear the thought of such shame; to shout for help to be taken off his own boat was too humiliating!

"We shall have to do it *sometime*," I pointed out; "and for you to swim ashore, and then wander about in a bathing-suit trying to borrow a boat, would not be a bit more dignified, and I don't see any alternative."

Jack's reason produced no answer, but his pride would not give in. I waited till the two men were both below and watched for a passing dinghy, and Providence kindly provided the nicest kind, an owner without crew attached. I hailed him. He rested on his sculls, and waited further developments. Jack heard my conversation quite well, needless to say, as *Skeletta's* dimensions are not enormous; but he, manlike, waited till I had the matter arranged in my helpless feminine way, then ran lightly on deck, as though he had just heard, and thanked our friendly Charon cheerily, and apologised by inference for his wife's unnecessary worry over the temporary absence of the men. But at least we got ashore.

The advantages of lying at Ardentrive were now nil, for the crew had found all the drink they wanted at our expense, and we had merely the personal inconvenience of having the whole bay to cross. At Oban they could have got drunk at less inconvenience to us! But Jack is "that deep-thoughted!"

Jack and the Don went off on a punitive expedition against our late crew, who had thought fit to remove all their kit as well as our dinghy. This is against all the rules! The elaborate outfit each man is provided with becomes his only at the end of a satisfactory

season's engagement, which is not how one could describe this crew's performance !

I went to meet Sandy.

His ankle seemed to have been quite cured, or else forgotten, but there was a brooding melancholy about him which was quite Byronic and very dull ! We had tea together, and bought food ; but he had discovered the world was hollow, and did not care who else knew it ! I did hope a new crew would soon be caught, for sailing would soon cure the youth, whereas much lying at anchor makes even me as melancholy as if I were in love.

The other two joined us for dinner. They seemed to have spent most of their time at the police office striving against the apathy of all Scotch policemen on the subject of drink. They had seen Peter, drunk again, stotting about the railway pier trying to get money from innocent tourists by talks of a wicked yacht owner who had left him behind without any wages, and "*Skeletta*, R.N.Y.C.," on his jersey ! Jack groaned, and nearly laid his diminished head on the table. The most the policeman would commit himself to was that the man was a bit foolish, but would be all right when the drink was out of him. What Jack wanted was his uniform out of him. It was a long and moving tale they had to tell, but the end is all that

matters. They retrieved the clothes, paid off the old crew, and were on with a new one.

" It's really only two-thirds of a crew, for one of it's a boy," said Jack.

But, as the Don pointed out, the average was all right, as the other one was an octogenarian—or thereby !

After dinner Sandy forgathered with some people who had come in the same coach, one being the local doctor's son. Sandy seemed to be making very successful efforts to hide his aching heart under a smiling exterior—no doubt the little American girl with them did not find it difficult to pluck from his bosom his quite recently rooted sorrow.

Our new crew met us at the dinghy after dinner. The old man was the queerest old thing ! like a very elderly gnome with a grey, stragglingly pointed beard, and the liveliest eyes under thatched pent roofs of eyebrows. He had the alertness of a gnome too, pathetically so, I thought, for it was probably meant to hide his age. The boy was the kind of brat one sees in choirs—well-washed, and obviously naughty ! His name was Sam, and the gnome was " Mr Campbell " ; why " Mr," we none of us found out. I suppose it was the same sort of honourable prefix that " Mrs " is to an elderly spinster cook.

Next morning, after a hearty breakfast, it was a relief to find that Sandy had decided with Stevenson that even if dolls were stuffed with sawdust they still made excellent playthings, and he was quite cheery and keen on seeing the new American girl-doll again. As for Sheila—her name *was* Sheila, I think—if he had ever read Swinburne, which I am sure he has not, he might have quoted with appositeness—

> "And she's forgotten my kisses,
> And I've forgotten her name!"

Sam did not even pretend to be a mariner. He had never been in a sailing-boat in his short life, but he *had* occasionally helped his mother in the kitchen, beyond which his only qualification for anything was being "a good lad." After a short experience of him on board, we came to the conclusion that this was not a very marketable asset. But the creature was full of goodwill; a wide grin with a cheerful "Right-o!" was his unvarying answer to every order, indeed to every remonstrance also! The china "came away in his hands" with daily regularity, and the glasses which survived were apparently protected by the film of grease he put on them, and the teaspoons went over with the dirty water. At each change of tack, while we were sailing, there was a crescendo of crashes from the fo'c'sle,

as every utensil somersaulted across the ship, or an unfastened pantry drawer shot out and scattered knives and forks in every direction. Sam remained unperturbed, and his cheery, cheeky little face would be seen popping up from below as he arose to commit all the broken articles to the deep.

Mr Campbell had been a sailor in his day, but that day was long past. He ran about with wonderful alacrity, but his power on a rope when he reached it was not much greater than my own. His invariable "Aye, aye, sir!" sounded very hearty, but the help behind it was very feeble. The one accomplishment he had perfected by diligent practice, through a long life, was—spitting! I don't know whether he chewed tobacco, or merely the remembrance of a foul pipe, but he spat continuously and with extraordinary dexterity! At first my anxiety was extreme; with wind and waves and heel to calculate, and yet to attain accuracy without even moving from his perch amidship, seemed a degree of perfection unlikely to be attained in so casual a habit, but to Mr Campbell there was nothing haphazard in spitting: he had brought it to an art.

We had a splendid sail round Ardnamurchan, but Mr Campbell was far from enjoying it. There was a biggish sea, and Jack had told the

man and boy to come aft, so as not to get wet. I was steering, and perhaps I brought rather more water over the weather-bow than did justice to *Skeletta;* but at every shower Mr Campbell grew more and more nervous, and almost implored Jack to take the tiller.

"The lady is very clever, very clever indeed, at the steering, but it is not a good sea for a lady at-all-at-all! It would be better if the gentleman took it, I'm thinking."

Jack airily answered that I preferred steering, and that I steered even better than himself, which, apart from being husbandly untruth, was a terrifying announcement to Mr Campbell! Here we were at the mercy of wind and waves, only a woman body at the helm, and a master who evidently did not even know how to control the woman, let alone the boat! In gloomy resignation, he spat heartily clean across the counter. His skill was perfect, but my nerve wobbled, and as I kept one wary eye on him, the other, unaided, was not enough for the steering, and *Skeletta* in spite kicked up half a ton of water over the quarter! Poor Mr Campbell! His worst fears seemed about to be realised; he almost began to swim on deck, thinking he was overboard, and I hardly wonder, for it was almost as wet in the one place as the other.

Jack has often been heard to assert that *Skeletta* is a dry boat, not in the American sense, but just literally. Little as the expectorator's opinion mattered, still less Sam's, which was a minus quantity, Jack could not bear that either should return to the land of the living and breathe a word against *Skeletta*—rather let the truth about his wife's steering be known at last ! So, to Mr Campbell's audible relief, Jack took the helm, and *Skeletta* proceeded with self-conscious rectitude, making it clear to the men how entirely it had been the other woman's fault !

We anchored in Loch nan Uamh—that, at least, is how it is spelt, although the evasive Gaelic pronunciation seems to have little to do with that. The one thing quite certain is the beauty of this place. It is not one of the long fjord-like lochs so characteristic of the West Coast ; it is more of a deep open bay. We lay close in to the shore, behind some of the many rocky islets of grey stone, whose many-coloured lichens and sea-pinks glowed like enamel in the setting sun. This is a very centre of Jacobite romance ; just here is where Prince Charlie landed, and later hid for days in a cave, and in this bay the French frigate sailed in, as we did, and picked up the royal fugitive. It is Oscar Wilde who says there is no greater mis-

take than expecting those who are the cause of great tragedies to share in the feelings suitable to the tragic mood, and that is very probably true of Prince Charlie and the tragedy he left behind; but here, in this wonderful spot, one might believe the mourning country of Scotland was more sensitive than her Stuart prince, and turned a countenance of infinitely sad and romantic beauty towards the place of farewell. The high hills of Moidart look down on the one side to the spot where the banner was raised so bravely and so hopefully, and on the other on the cave of hiding and the secret flight. There, to the south, is the dark headland of Ardnamurchan, which shut him out for ever from the eyes of his abandoned followers, and the high lonely islands of Eigg and Rum look on.

Sam was unimpressed! He began fishing! Sandy did his best by whistling "Over the Sea to Skye," but was interrupted by Jack, to whom "boats" and "wings" suggested another song of his youth, and he carolled lustily about "White wings that never grow weary." Romance fled!

Sandy joined Sam at the deep-sea fishing over the bows. They produced an immense supply of creatures, varying in size from white-bait to sprats, which Jack insisted would be excellent eating. Sam proceeded to the cooking,

while Sandy continued the supply. Presently Sam's round face, red from cooking and excitement, looked out of the fo'c'sle hatch.

"Oh, Mum!" he said to me, "do look at they wee fishes! They're wrigglin' about in the pan!"

It was only too true—this fresh-fish supply was much too fresh, for the wretched creatures were really living when put in the pan! Sam was squeaking with joy. If he had been an "assistant tormentor," unlike Shadbolt, he would have been so because he liked assistant tormenting! He was utterly dashed, and equally mystified, when I insisted that this vivi-cooking must cease.

"Then what am I to do, Mum?" he inquired.

For the sake of those unacquainted with Scotch modes and accents, I had better explain that he called me "Mum," not from a feeling of filial devotion, but because that is the Scotch for madam or ma'am.

I made him and Sandy try to kill them individually with a knock on the head with a spanner—but it was more like a game of tiddly-winks, and the fishy counter generally jumped overboard, except when the player hit his thumb instead. After that I just went weakly aft, and decided that what the eye did not see the heart

would not grieve over, and thought of all the oysters I had eaten without even the intervention of the frying-pan! If an oyster wriggled as the preparatory pepper fell upon it, could one eat it as calmly? No; we are not kind-hearted, but merely unimaginative!

After dining off the barely defunct fish and more definitely defunct mutton, we held a council to decide our next move. Charts were spread, tide-tables and the Sailing Directions produced, and every one contributed a pointer of some kind, whether a pair of compasses or a pencil, and all four heads met over the diminutive table and impeded each other's view. Jack wielded the parallel-rulers and sidled about the chart with them, cursing at frequent intervals as some one else's interested arm jogged his, and the perilous journey had to be begun again. The Don stalked over the chart, measuring distances, the dividers looking like an attenuated giant taking seven-league steps. Jack's attention was not so exclusively on his slipping rulers that he did not remark the Don's tendency to go overland in his divider's march, and he remarked bitterly—

"Whether it's the dividers on the chart or the actual boat on the sea, every beginner tries to turn corners before they reach them!"

As this is a standing quarrel, the Don retaliated—

"I am merely making a rough calculation," to which the Skipper growled—

"It would certainly *be* rough on *Skeletta* if we went by it!"

Jack very properly lays down the rule that one must not *begin* to turn any corner till it is "abeam"; the only difficulty is getting Jack and the man at the helm to agree on when the point *is* abeam, and we are all convinced that Jack will only grudgingly admit this to be the case when the "point" (whether headland, lighthouse, or ship) is vanishing astern. When it comes to chart-work there is some method of chasséing round corners that is very pretty to watch, but beyond my understanding.

There was some talk of going into Mallaig for letters and provisions, and the Don, still manipulating the dividers, announced it was seventy miles. Jack was so flabbergasted that he exclaimed—

"Oh no, my dear!"—habit in "arguing each case with his wife" making him unconsciously fall into the maritally tutorial manner.

The "dear" Don insisted, and laid his expanded dividers against the scale that frames a chart. It *was* seventy miles, sure enough—only the scale was on the General Chart, which

was lying under the one on which the measurements had been taken, showing only its edge, and the difference was rather like changing pounds to francs, although the explanation was easier to follow.

The great point to decide is always North or West. There is such an attraction in both. Jack refuses to see what intrinsic attraction there can be in any point of the compass, regardless of the place reached—but there *is!* Both North and West are full of romance—it is just a chance which appeals most at any one moment. The youth wanted to go north. Without more conscious desire to "buck" than another, it did appeal to him to be able to say what a long way north he had gone: "to go right round the top, down the other side," as he unscientifically expressed it, "would be awfully jolly, you know." But the Don and I rather yearned for the west. It does not convey so much impression of distance to the mainland-dwellers, who think in terms of coast-line, but there is a kind of Columbus feeling about sailing to little islands in the west, though such different ones, when reached, from West Indian islands!

Jack sat down and began, ostentatiously, to read a mere novel.

"When you three have decided those im-

portant romantic matters, let me know; perhaps I could then help in the minor, uninteresting, but practical details connected with winds and tides."

We sat reproved and sensible. Conversation between the Don and me is apt to soar like the telegraph wires seen from a railway-train, and we have to be frequently hauled down and fastened to earth again by Jack's common-sense, just as the poles seem to snatch at and pin down the aspiring wires.

"Come along, old chap," said the Don, with neatly articulated heartiness; "I admit I can, like the great lexicographer, talk at times as loosely as any man, but I also admit that this is an ill-judged moment—time, tide, and navigating skippers being serious exigent affairs." Then, turning to me with a little bow, which only the sudden disappearance of a book between his knees prevented from being most courtly, he added, "*Place aux dames!* Madame will decide."

The wires seemed to be soaring again, so I swooped down to meet the terrestrial pole with a quick decision.

"Westward Ho! then, and Jack can choose which spot in the Hebrides is best suited for *Skeletta* to make; personally, I want to go to Tarbert."

Jack merely grunted, and did not even condescend to consult the chart, but remarked—

"Even measured overland in your favourite style it is only about a hundred and thirty miles, so perhaps you had better guess again."

"I turned and hummed a bitter song," though I am much afraid Jack's unmusical ear failed to detect the bitterness, but the Don may have, and at once tried suavity as an antidote—

"Madame, of course, means Tarbert *ultimately*, which was the point being considered; what ports we make *en route* is now for the Owner to decide."

Jack allowed himself to be wooed back to a discussion that was admirably practical and dull, and the decree went forth that on the morrow's morn we would set out for Loch Slapin, in Skye, for the express purpose of visiting Loch Coruisk. I had not the slightest desire to visit Loch Coruisk; I bracket it in my mind with Iona, having seen both "on the line" at innumerable picture shows: blonde scene—Iona; brunette—Coruisk. But people are apt to admire places because they know the name, and as Coruisk has attained even postcard fame, it would be considered very wrong not to see it; besides, as the Don pointed out, not to do so would put one at a disadvantage with the

tourists who stay at Sligaghan Hotel, and become authorities on the West Coast.

Jack went on deck to communicate our decision to the ill-assorted crew, who were not enjoying the usual chilly moonlight in the open air, but were in the fo'c'sle, where the hot stove and Mr Campbell's pipe were creating a froust of almost tangible density. The Don and I prepared to stay in peace where we were, but Sandy, to whom all immobility is unwelcome, tried to rouse us to " a row round in the dinghy "; but even his enthusiasm for the moon left us cold, as in the most literal sense it would have done had we gone. I did not want to seem too apathetic, so went on deck to look, at least, at the glorious moon. A short look was enough ; I wrapped my arms round me and shivered and admired ; but Sandy went off on his own, and, I hope, managed to feel young and sentimental in spite of the chilliness and our middle-agedness. I gratefully descended to the prosaic but warm lamp-lit cabin.

The Don was nearly asleep, but roused himself to discuss, in a desultory sleepy manner, the deceitfulness of moonlight in these latitudes.

" We are brought up on a literature, both classic and popular, which insists on a quite exotic notion of moonlight, and I fancy quite a number of ignorant young creatures have been

deluded by it, and have taken their young buds of sentiment out of a comfortable decent room to have them blighted by the chill of a British moon."

I cordially agreed! Shivers and goose-flesh is all that moonlight in these climes ever did for me.

Jack returned presently, obviously deep in gloomy annoyance, and with him I could not attribute it solely to disillusionment with the moon.

"*More* trouble!" he growled, as though our life hitherto had consisted of nothing else. "That fool Campbell wants to leave."

"*Mr* Campbell?" the Don and I exclaimed in fatuous distinction, as though "that fool" and "Mr" Campbell were not obviously one and the same.

"The silly idiot pretends that he was only engaged to cruise up the coast, and that he would never have agreed to go farther in what he calls 'they wee fancy ships, and wi' ladies too.'"

Jack spurted soda into his glass as viciously as though it were Mr Campbell's throat he were compressing rather than the syphon's.

"Have a drink, old man," the Don helpfully suggested, as it dawned on him the drink was ready. "Indeed, have 'another and another

cup' to drown the memory of this impertinence."

I suggested that Mr Campbell's help being removed would not make much difference, and cheerfully added—

"Sam, such as he is, matters really more, for the meals do in fact get cooked, and the fittest of the china survives."

As Sam's work, not Campbell's, would fall to me, this was, no doubt, a very selfish view of our affairs. It was rewarded more suitably than all such egotism.

"Don't worry about that," said Jack with bitter amusement. "Sam's going too."

This was too much; I went to remonstrate with Sam myself. To the coyly smiling Sam I said with Hamlet's beautiful directness—

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, Mum," said he, with suitable evasiveness.

"Then why talk nonsense about leaving us?"

"I don't want to leave *you*, Mum, but——"

"Do you not like the yacht?" I asked, thinking of Mr Campbell's insulting references.

"Oh yes, Mum, but——"

"But what?" His rhetorical pauses were becoming nerve-racking.

"Oh, Mum, my mither wouldna' like me to go furrin' wi'oot tellin' her."

There is, even in some misrepresentations, an implied compliment which makes one willing to bear the rest. The idea that any of us were "goin' furrin'" appealed to me quite a lot, and hardly even to retain my washer-up could I bring myself quite to scout a notion so flattering to my sense of adventure!

I compromised. I said we would telegraph and tell his mother and not sail till she knew, to which suggestion he replied with his usual "Right-o!" and he descended again to Mr Campbell's "smelthy hell" of a fo'c'sle, and I to the cabin, flushed with conceit in our adventure and my diplomacy.

XII.

Next morning *Mr* Campbell was to take his departure by the train to Fort William. No countryside could look more devoid of such inventions than Loch Nan Uamh, where every prospect pleases and only the railway would be vile, were it not quite inconspicuous, though conveniently near.

Jack said he must go in the opposite direction to Mallaig, to replace our second collapsible crew, and the rest of us were to explore the local Jacobite places of interest. Sam helped to row us ashore, so as to take the dinghy back, and become sole custodian of *Skeletta* till we returned in the afternoon. When we had landed, Sam asked if he might go to the station to carry Mr Campbell's luggage. The sausage-like bundle so designated would not have taxed even Mr Campbell's strength, but Sam's offer seemed a decent filial courtesy from the junior part of the crew, so we graciously accorded our permission.

The train-farers having all departed towards Loch Aylort station, the Don, Sandy, and I set out for Prince Charlie's cave. In the mass and jumble of boulders, fallen rock, and fissures, the cave would be pretty impossible to find but for a well-defined path made by the questing feet of previous visitors. Even then the entrance might easily escape one but for the unexpected sight of a few candle-ends clinging to a rock like pallid sea-anemones. Such unusual fauna would attract the least observant, and by their help as pillars of wax outside and glimmers of flame within we found the dark dank cleft in the rocks where Prince Charlie lay when waiting the appearance of the French frigate. Whether his successful escape was due to the security of the cave, the loyalty of his followers, or the embarrassed half-heartedness of the Government's search, it would require more serious historical students than we three to determine.

We ate our lunch on the rocks outside, trying to imagine what such pursuit and flight must feel like. The Don had promised to bring the drink.

"I suppose you have not forgotten it, have you, Don?" I asked, being morally sure he had.

He reproved me with a look. "Madame, indeed you wrong me," he said, and produced with a noble, if slightly self-satisfied gesture,

the flask. He opened it, then peered into it —a very uninformative method with a solid flask !—then listened to it, " but answer there came none ; and this was hardly odd, because "— he had forgotten to fill it !

Later, we fell in with what must have been the oldest inhabitant of those parts, unless they are a singularly long-lived race. We asked him about Prince Charlie, expecting Jacobite enthusiasm and some local stories. But the old gentleman was taciturn and obviously " fed up " with this subject, and finally announced he didn't believe there had ever been any such person, or, if there had, he had never been thereabouts.

" Puir, fushionless, feckless chiels, they Stuarts, ony way," was his embittered summary.

There is a tiny private station on the line near where we were, and a kind permission to stop the train there had been given us by the proprietor ; so after clambering about the rocky hillside, seeing gorgeous views, and getting our feet very wet, we were thankful to get into the train without further effort. Jack was in it, and hailed us into his carriage. He had interviewed owners and " hands " from fishing-boats all day, and reeked of fish and black twist. He had consumed and stood many drinks, as that kind of talking is considered dry work.

Remembering Mr Campbell's juicy punctuations, I could believe that an advantage. The upshot was that there was a good man who might be wanting a job expected the next day. He was a diver to trade, and was just finishing a job up north, repairing the lower regions of lighthouses.

"Surely, Jack," I said, "to take a diver as part of the crew is rather lugubriously forethoughted, even for a White Knight?"

Jack deigned no reply.

Sandy pointed out that it would be awfully useful when we wanted to know if the anchor was quite comfortable—the skipper could just go down and see. While I listened to Sandy with one ear, I heard with the other Jack say to the Don very earnestly, "And the man is a first-class piper," and just as I was trying to visualise a diver playing bagpipes, we stopped at our own station.

"I hope Sam will be less deaf to shouts than the last crew," I said as we went down to the beach.

"Oh, he'll be fishing for more whitebait, I expect, and see us soon enough," Jack assured me.

But he wasn't. There was *Skeletta* lying aloof and stately, with her tall slim mast reflected in the perfectly calm sea, nothing breaking the

mirror-like surface, not even her little dinghy. No premonition of disaster came to me; I merely said—

"Why, we've missed Sam somehow."

We looked around—there was no Sam; and then Jack's nautical eye detected a clue to the mystery. The dinghy was lying on the shore; but not neatly and newly beached, but lying broadside on to the shore, and the painter, which was made fast to a stone, was wet and covered with seaweed. I was still stupidly unenlightened, till Jack explained that it was clear "to the meanest intelligence" (his own, I suppose, as it was not clear to mine) "that the dinghy had been there all day, and the tide had been up and down again." "The boy, oh, where was he?" Fort William, and so home to his over-anxious and probably hypothetical mother?

"Now, if only that piping diver were here, he could play an appropriate lament," the Don remarked.

As it was, Jack spoke "one bitter word that scarce was fit for me to hear," but which, having heard, I could only say, "Oh, Jack!" and add, "But them's my sentiments."

We returned to abandoned *Skeletta*, and proceeded to light up lamps and stoves, and get a meal, uncheered by the treacherous "Right-o's" of Sam, who had smiled and smiled and been

a villain. I thought of him almost tearfully as I washed the few cracked plates he had left us—whether I was tearful because I thought of him or of myself is uncertain. The latter, I fancy. I could not love thee, Sam, so well, loathed I not cooking more!

Getting under way next morning was a fairly lengthy process. In retrospect, Sam and Mr Campbell appeared a competent and hard-working crew. Sandy had learnt a good deal since his inauspicious start, and his energy and weight were very useful when applied to the right job. There was only one hectic moment after getting off, when he put his hand upon the weather runner instead of the weather topping-lift, and Jack—fortunately for the mast, if unfortunately for Sandy—saw him! The stentorian expletive which rent the air would have made any one desist from anything, which was all that was wanted. The explanations and adjurations which followed safety were dull in comparison.

With a full crew I am merely the steerer, and under orders; now, with no crew, I was promoted to some command. Jack again said, modestly, "I can't do *everything*," and went forward to stow the anchor, and took Sandy to break out the jib when ordered, and the Don remained aft to manage the mainsheet for my

benefit. As we had the whole bay to ourselves, except for the island, my first efforts at command were spared the criticising eyes of onlooking yachts. Still, I was quite thrilled enough, and felt rather as I do when driving off at the first tee, where foozling is only ignominious, not disastrous.

" Off the ground ! " sang out Jack.

" Break out the jib to port ! " I replied with conviction, knowing that Jack would alter the order as well as superintend the carrying out if he saw reason.

The result was not all I hoped for, and I had a horrid conviction we were going straight into the nearest island, so I shouted to the Don—

" Let out the mainsheet ! "

I don't quite know why, but one always shouts these sorts of orders, even when the ordered being is within a foot of one, though, for all the conviction I felt in the statement, a tentative whisper would have suited. The Don looked ahead critically, and instead of replying briskly, " Away it is ! " argued instead. *Skeletta* has no patience with academic discussion, and continued in her own way, waiting, I suppose, for a lead from her master's voice. To be uncertain of one's own knowledge in a boat is bad, but to have some one else question

it is worse! But I stuck to it with forlorn valour.

"Hurry up—let out that mainsheet!"

But it is hard to hurry, though simple enough to flurry, the Don! He now shouted forward to Jack—

"I say, Skipper, *ought* I to let out the mainsheet? Should we not rather——"

"Damn it, man!" came his answer, "don't talk! do what you're told by the man at the helm!"

The mainsheet went out; we cleared the island, and for a moment's silence I wondered if the Don's feelings were hurt. He coiled the slack of the rope with more than usual care, then seated himself on top of it, and remarked—

"Nothing so much tends to obliterate plain duties as the free indulgence of the speculative habit: see Augustine Birrell, his works."

When Jack came aft I nearly left the helm to kiss him in gratitude. It is so upholding to be backed in little things. No doubt a decent husband might consider it his duty to die for one, but the necessity so seldom arises, whereas just to be backed in a trivial argument, or upheld in even a verbal mistake, is very endearing and comforting, and can happen so much oftener.

We had a head wind going to Mallaig, and for

a short sail I never wish anything else, but what is less pleasant to my inexpertness is having to make a small full harbour like Mallaig while running before the wind. It is difficult to make a sailing-boat stand still at any time, but to do so with the wind dead aft always seems to me impossible : even a toy boat makes excellent progress in that position. I should have a more implicit faith in Jack, perhaps, but even with the amount I have, which is as much as is compatible with matrimony, I prefer to understand as well. Jack booms out orders so suddenly that, without some idea of what is coming next, one boom is not enough for me. I always hate steering before the wind, and my mind is so obsessed with the dread of gybing that I am impervious to any other idea. I knew Jack would expect me to run coolly up to the very shore, and then luff up between two boats where there was barely room for a dinghy. I need not have worried. *Skeletta* just folded her wings—at least, Jack had the mainsail hard in and so catching almost no wind,—and we drifted in elegantly and composedly and rounded up at the psychological moment between an Irish yawl and a small steam-yacht.

" *Very* pretty, *I* think," Jack purred ; and I knew it was not the scenery which caused his

enthusiasm, but that we all shared in *Skeletta's* glory.

It is very important, at least to one's self-respect, to manœuvre well in a fishing harbour. The fishermen have a hard-working life, I know, but to mere daylight livers they have a deceptive air of having no occupation whatever, except to stand, hands deep in trouser-pockets, gazing at the harbour, in groups and coveys, like solemn penguins! On this occasion it was vitally important, for any one of the penguins might be our future crew; indeed, as the Don said, the description of him suggested a sea-bird, but whether the Greater Piping Diver or the Lesser Diving Piper, we could better tell when we had seen him.

I went ashore with Jack to see if the possible new man was there and available. This sort of job is not set about with crude business-like directness, but approached through a haze of meandering conversations about anything rather than crews, and is punctuated with friendly drinks. Even these same drinks are not offered or accepted without circumlocution, the word "drink" being as taboo as mention of the Deity—except as an expletive! I never quite gathered how Jack made the offer—I only realised it was made when I heard the accept-

ance: "I should not be minding if I did." Then we adjourned to the smaller hotel, and I tactfully found a necessary message to be done elsewhere.

During one such adjournment I met the Don and Sandy wandering disconsolately about, having got a fisherman to put them ashore. We decided to go to the big hotel and have tea. On the way we met a party of yachtsmen, so immaculately dressed that they seemed walking advertisements of "faultless yachting attire."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sandy, "those jossers must own *some* yacht!"

I scoffed. "My poor innocent boy, I don't believe people in clothes like that own a ten-foot dinghy!"

"They are probably harmless stranded English, who have innocently strayed from the Solent," was the Don's more charitable suggestion.

By this time we were just going to pass them, the short-sighted Don as unconscious as ourselves, when he was surrounded and seized upon by these too-beautiful creatures! Sandy and I hesitated, and I wondered whether we should rescue him or save ourselves. The fate of the hesitator was ours; the Don emerged,

flustered, from their midst, and turned the whole crowd of tailors' models on to us.

"Let me introduce—Mrs Boffins—and er—Mr Boffins—er——" and the Don's introductory remarks trailed off into the inarticulate, as is the way of such.

"Ah de du?" said a voice, which seemed to come straight over the footlights of a provincial music-hall. The face corresponded—a mature "ingénue." What *had* the Don, of all people, been doing in that *galère?*

An explanation was at once forthcoming from the leading comic man—I mean Mr Boffins.

"Delighted to meet any friend of the Laird's—we always call him the Laird, don't we?" (Hearty slap on the shuddering "Laird's" shoulder.) "We've got a little place alongside of him, you know; nothing very grand, you know; just a tidy little shootin' and some fishin' and all that, you know."

Still dazzled by the white trousers and deck-shoes, the badges and yachting caps, I found myself asking, "How nice; and which are you doing here—shooting or fishing?"

Mr Boffins laughed with immense joviality, and gathered the rest of his male chorus into it with a "Now, boys, how do you like that? And all got up to kill in your yachtin' togs?"

Such a complete lack of pretentiousness was both disarming and confounding, and I stammered at my own inanity, which seemed mere rudeness. But with their wonderful clothes and horrible accents, they had also good tough skins and infinite good-humour, and we all sauntered back to the hotel, chatting amiably and uproariously about nothing.

At tea we were joined by the daughter and heir of the house of Boffins. She was the twopenny coloured edition of their penny plain, and as they had made both the pennies themselves, it seemed pathetic that the expenditure of them should produce something of so little value. We were none of us in smart enough clothes to command her attention, though she condescended to patronise the Don ; but with the male chorus in attendance, she performed all her little social songs and dances for our edification, and asserted her superiority over her adoring parents in a manner less becoming than she perhaps imagined.

I was quite wrong about the ten-foot dinghy ; they were in a forty-ton motor-boat. I had forgotten about motor-boats. They were not dining or sleeping aboard.

" The sea's all very fine when it *is* fine," observed Mr Boffins, " but it's me for

the dry land when there's a decent hotel on it!"

Sandy had been absorbed into the chorus, and showed a wonderful aptitude for the part, which I hoped was less a natural gift than the result of adaptability. I tried to sympathise; I suppose the dullest individual who spoke one's own language would be welcome after a too long sojourn with foreigners. These young creatures all knew the same patois, whereas with us poor Sandy was confined to dull ordinary English.

When Jack, unforewarned, followed us into this stronghold, and gave away the fact that we had no supply of cooks and stewards, of course nothing could save us from the overwhelming hospitality of Mr and Mrs Boffins. We were dined and wined, and the chorus gramophoned and danced, and Sandy showed signs of being a wit and wag in the unknown language, and was a transformed being from the quiet rather bored youth we knew on board *Skeletta*.

Through bursts of girlish laughter and Boffin *bonhomie*, Jack managed to shout that the Diving Piper was an actuality, and would be on board in the morning.

A bevy escorted us to the harbour, waking

the gulls from their fish-digesting sleep with snatches of rag-time song and raggier-time talk. Jack was so relieved to be back on board that he spent ages "tidying things on deck," but really just patting everything on his beloved and silent *Skeletta*. The poor Don was worried and apologetic—apologetic to his permanent hosts, but anxious not to be too disloyal to his dining hosts. I was merely dazed, and went to bed hearing the rejuvenated Sandy assaulting the Don's unwilling ears with faint echoes of Boffin hilarity.

. . . . . .

Sandy is gone! Not lost, I hope, although gone with the Boffins. Having seen a young man they wanted, it did not occur to them they should not ask for him: and as I am neither his sister nor his cousin nor his aunt, I made no attempt to answer for him. So he went.

Jack's only reflection on the whole matter was, "Silly young fool!"

I thought of some income-tax paper, or some such matter, on which I once read, "State nature of incapacity—*i.e.*, lunatic, minor," and I tried to persuade Jack it was merely a case of "minor."

"Well, I said *young* fool," retorted Jack.

"Very tautological, my dear fellow," was the Don's comment.

I am afraid we are all three getting elderly; my sympathies went out to Sandy, though I am glad that is all of me that had to follow him *chez les* Boffins.

XIII.

M'Leod came on board next morning, and brought with him an applicant for Sam's vacated place. They made a singular contrast. The Piping Diver was a splendid, big, square specimen of a man, with an eye that stared as fiercely through one as though one were so much deep water, and a general air of muscular capability as becomes a man who is expected to build piers or raise wrecks, or any little job like that. Hamish, the new second hand, was like a dyspeptic and indigent poet. His figure drooped into the curves of an interrogation point, and his sad eyes seemed to show how much he suffered from the question never being answered. I asked him if he could cook. He sighed deeply, and raised his dog eyes almost to mine, and said—

"It iss at the fishing I have been."

"Then you have not cooked much?"

"Yess" (with another sigh); "it iss myself that did the cooking."

M'Leod came to the rescue in a big resolute voice—

" Oh, Hamish is a good enough lad at cooking. The fishermen don't get much variety, you know, mum, but they like their fish and 'taties and tea good ; don't they, Hamish ? "

Hamish sighed in resigned acquiescence. I, too, acquiesced in Hamish's engagement, and suppressed the sigh. After all, he could at least wash up, and could hardly know less than Sam.

What Hamish lacked in breezy sailorishness, M'Leod more than made up, and with his help we got under way more quickly than we had ever done before. His weight on a rope was as effective as an electric winch, and his commanding appearance and big voice inspired even Jack with a belief that he knew what he was doing. It was as well Hamish was so slim and curved, for there could have been no room in the fo'c'sle for another upright circular body as well as M'Leod's.

We were rather late in starting, owing to Sandy's departure and the crew's arrival, but we had a good north-east breeze—a direction more often prayed for than vouchsafed in the summer months. My spirits always get the better of my judgment when there is both wind and sun, but, fortunately, Jack can be counted on to take a drizzling-early-morning view of the

future under all conditions. So instead of making straight for Dunvegan at my suggestion, we made for Loch Slapin at his. There is something in names, and Dunvègan, with an accent grave, is more attractive than Slapin, however sloshily one pronounces the consonants, or however widely opens the vowels. I don't think Jack listens to these views of mine on our destination, and he certainly is not influenced by them—we were bound for Slapin for no reason of euphony, but because it was too late to go farther, and "I *suppose*," Jack added with sarcastic emphasis, "you two nature enthusiasts want to see Loch Coruisk."

I did *not* want to, but long before I could have fully explained why, Jack would have removed himself and his attention to a subject more important, and have taken in nothing but a feeling of mystified disappointment. Even the Don "ventured to wonder."

"It is because of picture galleries," I explained. "There are miles of canvas seas and lochs which leave me unmoved by wrath—but our poor beautiful West Coast seems always to be represented by two types which have become almost caricatures: the blondes are Iona, the brunettes are Coruisk! Reproduced without colour, they would make a most appropriate advertisement for Buchanan's 'Black and

White' !—no ; I don't a bit want to see purple, crimson, and indigo Coruisk any more than the white, green, and ultramarine Iona."

"Madame, because one county is coloured pink and another yellow in a map, do you then avoid travelling through them in reality ? "

"This correspondence must now cease.—Ed. Anyhow, I must go and talk sense to Hamish on the subject of the next meal."

I cannot honestly pretend I greatly loved Loch Slapin, but perhaps I was prejudiced by its name, and also by the high bare hills that shut us in and shut out the setting sun, which had looked so golden and beautiful outside, and still lit up the distant mountain tops, making them seem so much more peaceful and serene than the nearer, dark, gloomy hillsides.

Supper showed no signs of emerging from the fo'c'sle, so I rang for Hamish to show him how I had laid the table, that he might mark and learn for future imitation. He emerged, his drooping figure wilting in the low doorway, and his tragic face bedewed with tears of perspiration ! I tried to sound bright and hopeful while showing him where the knives and forks lived, and how they were used. He merely sighed ; but, on a further order, laboriously brought in the soup-tureen, clasping it with a dirty dish-cloth, whose ends trailed across the

table, sweeping forks and cutlery to the floor. We retrieved them and sat down. There were no plates. I rang. Hamish wearily opened the door, a picture of dumb resignation.

"Oh Hamish!" I said, still struggling to be bright, "we have no soup-plates—the deep ones, you know. Can you find them?"

"I will try," he sighed, with as much hopeless resignation as if I had asked him to conjure soup-plates from the vasty deep instead of from a rack in front of his nose. There was a long pause; then Hamish, mopping his brow with the same dirty cloth, reappeared, and offered me a salad-plate! I suppose he thought that people capable of eating soup out of tins might also lap it up off flat moon-shaped plates.

I was so afraid he might break into sobs if I told him to look for any more that I squeezed myself into the fo'c'sle and found them for him. He offered to wipe them with the same cloth; but I hastily assured him they were all right, so lowering what standard of cleanliness the poor thing had.

The Don received the plates from Hamish's dubious paws, and, as he shut the door on his last sniffling sigh, apostrophised him poetically: "I know not any tone so fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow."

"It's like living with the Mock Turtle," I

said, as I polished up the soup-plates with a table-napkin. Jack merely thought he was ill.

That night M'Leod got out his pipes, and the veriest Sassenach would have been converted to pipe music on this occasion: at least when we got a little farther away from it than was possible on *Skeletta*. We rowed out into the middle of the loch, the sculls making silver streaks of phosphorescence in the black water, and the queer melancholy music coming over the water seemed the very voice of these mysterious shadowy mountains and glens, all indistinctly merging with the dark waters, except where the still light northern sky threw them up in clear-cut silhouette.

We listened silently till the last wailing note died away with a Hamish-like sigh, and then rowed back to the bright little light, which was all that was visible of *Skeletta* in the darkness and shadow.

Having recovered from his momentary plunge into the poetic, Jack now insisted on putting out the fishing-net. Jack has explained several times that ours is a kind of net which one is legally allowed to have, and has nothing in common with the splash-nets carried surreptitiously by yachtsmen who are quite honest men ashore. To me it has never been anything but a smelly bundle of fishy string, and how

it is set I have never found out, as the very essence of the process is to be dark, damp, and cold. I think the thing stands for Romance in Jack's subconsciousness, though nothing would make him believe his interest was anything but utilitarian and rather altruistic. But, in fact, it is the gamble of it he loves—he backs the fish to come into his net as another backs a horse to win a race. Of course, he also studies fishy "form." Every time the net is set he tells us what will come into it, given the bottom we have, &c. It always sounds very varied and attractive, and the result is always the same: small rock-cod and innumerable inedible crabs!

This time the wretched Don, that conscientious guest, had to go too, and if ignorance of nets and their settings could be more abysmal than mine, it is his, and his natural ability to trip over anything—whether a cleat or a coil of rope, would have unlimited scope with the multitudinous folds of Jack's endless net in the narrow confines of the dinghy.

I went into the cabin, meaning to read in peace, but the itch to "tidy up" overcame me instead. Tidying up is an occupation that fills in all the interstices left between the many others. Jack maintains that with me it is an unbridled passion: I prefer to think it is womanly unselfishness. The White Knight's belongings

would make a jumble-sale effect in a room of the largest dimensions; but in *Skeletta's* cabins we would all become immovably buried in heterogeneous gear if I did not occasionally produce at least a surface order. While I was wondering how much of Jack's precious rubbish I dare put overboard, I thought I heard strange sibilant sounds from the fo'c'sle. I listened. They continued intermittently but quite definitely. As there was no one on board but myself, the thing began to feel eerie. I crept up on deck and peered forward. The fo'c'sle hatch was closed, so no one could be below—it must be a spirit-lamp with something wrong with its breathing—or something. I decided to investigate before further suppositions should undermine my nerve.

I went round by the door, as peering down the hatch seemed a less strategic position than standing upright in the cabin. I opened the door quietly and looked in. All was dark, and at first silent; then came the sound again, and this time clearly recognisable as a sob, followed by a Hamish sigh! I fetched a cabin lamp and penetrated into the now lit-up fo'c'sle, clearing my way through the atmosphere to the place the sounds came from. There was Hamish on his bunk, sunk in woe, my light reflected on his face, streaky with tears.

Unconsciously copying Wendy's question to Peter Pan, I said, "Oh Hamish, what is it? *Where* is it?"

The answer was not at once very enlightening. "Hamish" (sniff) "has only" (sniff) "been at the fishin' . . ." (gulp).

Setting the net was even worse than I thought evidently.

The wail continued. "It iss a long, long way that I haf come, and I would be getting back . . ." (snuffle, snuffle), "but it is a long, long way . . ."

A light dawned on me.

"Then you're not ill, Hamish, are you? You're just home-sick; is that it?"

No answer, but sighs.

"Do you want to go home again?"

At last a little hope and eagerness came into his face. "Yess, yess, that is it—it's home I would be going; but" (complete collapse again!) "it iss a long, long way."

"Where *is* your home?" I asked.

"In the Lewes," he sobbed forth.

"Well, we are going there as soon as we can, you know." I soothed him as if he were a child. After all, he was little more in years, and certainly no more in mind. "You buck up, Hamish, before the gentlemen come back, and you will be at home in a few days." And,

without waiting for more, I went back, as I heard the oars of the returning dinghy.

I spoke to M'Leod as he tied up the dinghy.

"I'm afraid Hamish is rather miserable. Do you know if there is anything wrong with him?" Home-sickness seemed an inadequate cause at his age.

M'Leod gave a big jolly laugh. "Oh, it'll be the pipes that have upset him—they kind of get at a man's vitals at times; I know the feeling fine, and he's just a lad, and never away long from his home till now. I'll sort him all right the now."

I did not inquire the details of the method employed; but next day, although Hamish never reached a smile, he ceased to sigh.

The first sounds of life next morning were made by the crew bringing back the net of many hopes. I woke Jack to superintend the disentangling. This, as usual, was a laborious process, for, as usual, the miraculous draught consisted chiefly of green crabs—and crabs involved in net are very tedious to deal with. I am afraid that M'Leod's feelings were not much more humane than Sam's, and the crabs were frequently removed by vivisection, the sections returning to the sea instead of to our frying-pan.

The good north-east wind still held, so, between

that inducement to sail and disappointment with the local fish, Jack forgot all about the proximity of Loch Coruisk, and we set off for Dunvegan, without verifying or correcting the Academy versions of that show-place.

Hamish was a shade less lachrymose, but almost had a relapse, owing to his difficulties with the coke stove. Ranges always behave badly with a new cook—they seem to dislike being handled by strangers, as much as a baby hates being bathed by a new nurse. I sympathised with Hamish and offered to help, though I had a suspicion the range would resent my interference just as much. It did. It puffed smoke out of all the cracks where no smoke should go, then sulked, and finally went out. I had been foolish enough to tell Jack I was going to light the thing, and, of course, he gave me exact instructions how to do it. *No* paper must be used—it only blocked the draught; very little wood was necessary, as the draught was quite enough to start the coke with one stick. When I had tried and failed with these methods, he gave me further instructions, but was too absorbed in a dismantled winch to come himself. I can't help believing in Jack every now and then about these kinds of useful facts, so I tried his theories again, and one by one burnt in futile efforts as many sticks

as would have lit three fires, if used in bundles. At every illusive puff of smoke that went up the chimney—the life-breath of the individual sticks—Jack called out, " There you are ! You see, if you treat the thing with the elements of science and common-sense, there's no bother at all ; it's only that you women never trouble to learn the elementary rules of draught control." (Being a man, Hamish's failure was forgotten !) " There, it's going splendidly now, isn't it ? " (This as a really steady column of smoke ascended.)

" Splendidly," I admitted.

After having given Jack's theories a fair trial, I had laid the fire with half a newspaper, a bundle of sticks, and a good sprinkling of methylated spirits, and lit it with one match and much ease. I could afford to let Jack crow ; it was a harmless pleasure to him, and the fire was lit, which was all I wanted. Tact has its victories no less renowned than argument, especially in married life !

About lunch-time I asked Jack what time we were likely to reach Dunvegan.

" With luck, to-morrow," was the answer.

When I expressed surprise, disappointment, and even incredulity, I only brought on myself a repetition of the stock sermon on reading sailing directions, charts, &c. The Don dis-

creetly said nothing, although I knew he had expected to reach Dunvegan quite as much as I. When Jack wants to be unpleasant without being exactly rude, he always apostrophises me as "you women." One might consider it a compliment to personify the sex so completely in one's husband's eyes, but that is not quite what he wishes to convey. He began again now, "If only you women would have more regard to facts . . ."

At this point my attention always wanders. When I was new to it I did try to make Jack see that there was no use two of us knowing the same things, and that the common stock of knowledge would be twice as large if we each contributed different items. Unfortunately when I talk like that, it is Jack's turn to let his attention wander!

The result of Jack's accumulation of facts was that we anchored that night in Loch Bracadale, a big, irregular, island-dotted opening in the south-west corner of Skye. Even by studying the chart, we could not discover that there was anything very near in the shape of a shop. There were various humble cots dotted about, and next morning we decided to try them for milk and eggs, for, had a shop existed, it would have been useless, as it was Sunday.

It was one of those quiet perfect days, from

a land point of view, clear, warm, and breathlessly still, and exactly what the Highlander expressly calls a "pet day." Again, from the landsman's point of view, it was "snappit up by the Sawbath," but that rather suited us than not, for it is an unwritten rule that one does not set sail unnecessarily on Sundays, although this is often hard enough to bear on a good sailing day; but, for our part, we found this breathless beauty was very suitable for Sabbath observance.

When Jack ordered round the dinghy, M'Leod surprised us by saying he and Hamish had better go and get water at the nearest burn. Far be it from us to demur if water were required, so Jack and the Don went too, to hasten that laborious business. It proved so warm a job in that blazing sun, that there had to be another delay while the men-folk bathed. At last we got started in the dinghy. We had not rowed far when, to our surprise, we saw the sails being put up! Most unusual zeal on a Sunday and without orders! Then the very jackyard topsail went aloft.

"M'Leod seems positively to enjoy pulling on things!" exclaimed the Don, with a sort of envy in his voice.

Jack, of course, was delighted. To have a kindred spirit on board who really *wanted*

to air sails that were not damp was a new joy!

While paddling gently shorewards, we passed close to a solitary islet of grey rock, flat and bare, and of no special interest, except as a thing not to run on to. No doubt its name, if we went into facts on the chart, would be Dubh Skeir or Eilean Dun! Jack's attention was riveted on it, as though it were a peril to navigating even the dinghy.

"I think we should land and have a look at that island in case there are terns' eggs on it," he solemnly announced.

"Supposing terns have set up house on so uninviting a site, are the eggs of use to any but the parents?" asked the Don, who had inadvertently come off in bedroom slippers, and foresaw a damp landing and a scrambling climb.

"As much use as plovers' eggs, anyhow," snorted Jack.

Of course we didn't believe him, but I at least was quite willing to explore the little island, and the Don was resigned. A murmur that "it seems a pity we did not bring an egg-box—in case" was his only outward sign of irritation.

The moment we had found a possible landing-place, it was obvious that not all the lockers in *Skeletta*, let alone an ordinary egg-box, would

hold all the eggs at our feet ; and it was equally obvious that the White Knight has not honour enough in his own ship, and I was filled with compunction at having flippantly underrated his In-caseishness !

In this salutary mood of humility I listened reverently to Jack's unexpected outburst of Natural History. We were only to take from nests with two eggs in it, as the tern lays at three-day intervals, and as she does not stamp the date on them, the first-laid might be perilously nearly the first-born if we chose at random from full nurseries. The nests were mere depressions in the coarse grass, and so close together that Agag might have found walking difficult ; so the Don was surely excused for occasionally demolishing an entire potential family. I am bound to say his exclamations, when this happened, seemed less to indicate concern for the bereaved tern than disgust at his now omelette-like bedroom slippers ! These migrating birds who visit France in winter have probably picked up scraps of French philosophy, and could bitterly agree with Rochefoucauld that " God may forgive sins, but awkwardness has no forgiveness in heaven or on earth." It is certainly true of earth, and I fancy it must be of heaven : an angel who upset one's nectar-and-soda with his wings, or a saint who trod on

one's robe. . . . No! The Don will have to practise at first amongst the Noble Army of Martyrs! Amongst us we picked up about two hundred, and as we now had no need to go to the cottages for mere hens' eggs, we paid for those we had taken by leaving our lunch sandwiches and cake for the terns; but whether it reached the really deserving cases instead of the greediest remains as uncertain as in most forms of dole and charity.

When we got back on board with our fragile cargo, it was as mirror-calm as ever, but the energetic M'Leod suggested that there would be an evening breeze, and if we once drifted out of the loch we would get the benefit in the open. But the chance of all-night drifts for no particular reason awoke no enthusiasm in us, and M'Leod had to agree reluctantly.

I cooked the little eggs myself, as I disliked the idea of an occasional broken one secreting itself about the fo'c'sle floor. They are smaller even than plovers' eggs, and more pointed. I boiled them in the bath-water-can in batches of a hundred, and then we started to eat them. Having already done the poor White Knight less than justice, I refrained from saying I was sure these precious eggs would be uneatable essence of fishiness, and the Don also said nothing but looked gloomily hungry. I am glad

I did keep silent, as Jack was again entirely justified. The eggs were even better than plovers', and much prettier: the yolks, when hard-boiled, were as beautifully coloured, red to yellow, as an Allen Richardson rose! We did eat thereof—enormously—and did give to the crew, and the two hundred disappeared more rapidly than it would be seemly to relate.

During the peace of after-supper laziness that evening we became aware of a noise on deck which filled us with amazement. Not that it was an inexplicable noise or even an unfamiliar one: it was the sound of deck-scrubbing. We all sat in puzzled silence for a moment, till Jack almost shouted the explanation as it flashed upon him: "The poor devils think it's Saturday night!" To avoid desecrating the morning peace on Sundays, the men always scrub the deck the night before; so here the poor deluded things were solemnly doing so, after a day of voluntary unnecessary toil, and in the morning it would be just Monday!

Perhaps one's sense of humour becomes simpler in the Simple Life, but certainly this joke of a lost Sunday amused us unto tears, and every fresh bucketful of water that sluiced along the deck started us off again.

The sequel to the egg incident, which might have been disastrous, may be added here. We

were dining with the representative of the law in one of these Western Isles, and mentioned with pride our feast of terns' eggs.

"In my capacity of host I am much interested," he said, "but in my capacity of Sheriff, it would be better not to tell me. 'Come to this end of the table where the Sheriff can't hear you,'" he quoted, "for unfortunately there is a fine of ten shillings imposed for every egg taken. Two hundred, did you say?"

We were indeed grateful that the Sheriff was also our host!

XIV.

Our departure from Loch Bracadale was without history, which does not necessarily imply that it was happy. We had an early-morning confab, carried on with heads stuck through the skylights. It was a dark uninspiring morning, but the 'graph oracles were at least non-committal, and there was some breeze. We decided to start, and proceeded to get up, but with that lack of *élan* so noticeable at 6.30 A.M.

By the time the sails were being hoisted, it had begun to rain, in the insidious way it has during that operation—not hard enough to make it necessary to put on oilskins, but enough to soak one before the end. Personally, I rather dislike getting under way before breakfast. It sounds very business-like and enthusiastic, but, in fact, it is always productive of brittle temper. The second hand is supposed to help on deck, but his attention is always divided between that and the culinary preparations below. In theory it is quite simple to have pots and

kettles on the stove with its protecting rail in such manner that they look after themselves, but in practice they have an infuriating way of sliding about, boiling over, burning dry, and other misdemeanours, which sound less probable, but are all quite usual. Hamish was even less like a bird than most people, and quite incapable of being in two places at once, so when Jack howled for him on deck, he was always below, and whenever he left the fo'c'sle the supposedly inanimate objects there at once misbehaved themselves.

As soon as we were out of our sheltered corner, and out into the open, we found as much wind as we wanted, and more than suited the scrambled eggs, which immediately slid from the stove to the floor! Hamish sighed deeply, and went to fetch more eggs. They live in a locker aft, as the fo'c'sle is rather too much like an incubator, so Hamish wandered along for the new supply, leaving the forward hatch open. The rain was now pouring down; we took a slight amount of spray over the bows; the newly made toast was lying exposed and helpless just below the open hatch, so when Hamish returned with the eggs, " with sighs and tears he sorted out " the less damp slices, and started again.

Jack professes not to care when he gets his meals, and pretends that hunger is mere lack

of nervous control. I admit it is with him, inasmuch as he has no nerves to control; I have, but evidently don't. The Don has no theories on the subject. To him, meals at regular hours are just natural phenomena, and till he lived on *Skeletta*, I doubt if he gave their whence and whither any serious thought. By the time Jack had become opinionative (in spite of his excellent nerves), the Don resigned, and myself irritable, Hamish's melancholy person appeared at the cabin-door and deposited the new instalment of eggs, breathing stertorously with the enormous effort. We asked for the coffee, but the milk had taken a mean advantage of his other strafs to get burned, so *it* was not ready. We ate dryly but gratefully. The toast followed by-and-by, and in the fulness of time, the coffee. The commonplace difficulty of getting the time, the place, and the loved one all together is as nothing to the difficulty of getting three articles of food simultaneously from Hamish!

The sail to Dunvegan can only be summarised in the Scottish word "dreich," which, amongst other things, means dull, dreary, dismal, depressing. The little slant-of-wind had only lasted long enough to spoil the breakfast, and thereafter we drifted about in a steady downpour of rain, with occasional flukes of wind—generally

from a useless direction. Jack, sitting immovable at the idle tiller, his sou'wester over his eyes and his collar up to his nose, looked really quite like a knight with lowered visor—only a Black Knight, not a White one.

We reached Dunvegan in the gloaming, and anchored in the usual squall supplied for the purpose, close to a little five-tonner.

The five-tonner's inhabitants took a great interest in our arrival. In the half-light we could merely see that there were two of them, but as soon as our anchor was down, they put off in their diminutive punt and came across to us. We had our strong petrol-gas lantern on deck to help the weaker among us to distinguish one rope from another, although Jack considers this merely encourages us in our persistent ignorance. This lamp at night has a curiously stagey effect; the ropes and spars stand out with startling clearness in places, and vanish in utter darkness in others; and the new-comers, standing in their dinghy, had the appearance of looking over the footlights at us from an invisible orchestra.

They proved to be a couple of Sandy-like youths, with blue sweaters, bare heads, and ingratiating grins. After preliminary apologies, one went on—

"We've been positively praying a yacht would

come in before night—we've scanned the horizon hungrily all day for a sail! . . . we want to borrow a pricker for our Primus! There isn't such a thing to be had in the village, and the beastly lamp simply *won't* go, and we *do* want a hot meal!"

A Primus pricker is a thing one would be safe to find on almost any yacht afloat—and so presumably dozens on the White Knight's. But such is the perversity of Fate that these poor hungry youths had hit about the one boat that possessed no such thing! Our stoves are all run by petrol, "in case" paraffin should get spilt and make a smell. I explained this; and as the two foot-lit faces looked alarmed as well as disappointed, I added—

"And we also carry a fire-extinguisher, 'in case' the petrol gets spilt and we blow up."

The obvious solution was to ask our prickerless neighbours to a hot meal with us, which, with due show of reluctance but obvious relief, they accepted. It was a very good meal, too! Even now, with a real crew to cook them, most meals on *Skeletta are* good. I wonder whether potatoes boiled in sea-water are really better, as Jack maintains, or if the explanation of their excellence is not rather that they are eaten *on* the sea-water! Some rich and rare products of "The Stores" were broached, and proved more

successful than the Euchred figs. The only contretemps was that the Don was entrusted to stow away a large bottle of pickled mangoes in the locker behind him, with the result that when he shut the locker and leant back against it, the bottle gave one crack and expired ; and its piccalilli life-blood oozed through everything inside, and then through the door on to the cabin cushions, and the solider bits of its anatomy slipped through amongst every other bottle and tin in the locker. I am afraid the Don, in his distress, quoted an appropriate but inelegant passage from the Old Testament.

Our guests were very young, very friendly, and very Irish. The White Knight nearly swooned on discovering that they had sailed from Dublin with no chart but the map in a railway time-table, and no compass but an ornamental wiggly one on the end of a watch-chain. With unthinkable insouciance, they had made use of any buoy up and down the coast, regardless of the sacrosanct character of the property of Trinity House or The Northern Lights Commissioners, and had moored their impertinent little craft to buoys, red, black, and even winking ! The White Knight looked quite pale and had another drink, and was almost relieved when these young specimens of reckless levity

removed themselves from his chaste and law-abiding *Skeletta.*

When we got up next morning we found the energetic M'Leod had been at work early. Every available spot on deck was glistening with a wet coat of varnish—lovely to look upon, but most inconvenient. The companion-hatch had to be moved with infinite precaution, the sky-lights were untouchable, and the cockpit was one glistening sticky surface. Nowhere was there rest for more than the sole of the foot, as even the covering-board, or, as one might say less technically, the margin of the deck, was gleaming with wet varnish. While I was surveying the uncomfortable sight, M'Leod was busy in the dinghy taking out the floor-boards, evidently intent on devastating the dinghy also. Although only second-in-command, I issued a stern order against any more activity of this special kind. Jack looked up from below.

"Why not varnish the dinghy? M'Leod is quite right; it's an ideal day for it."

"I know it's an ideal day," I replied, "but that's just why it seems a pity to burn our boats behind us and cut off all escape."

"Escape from what? and who's burning any boats?" Jack asked, partly querulous, partly surprised.

"I meant 'varnish,' of course, not 'burn';

but the result's much the same, as far as escaping's concerned."

"Escape *what?*" reiterated Jack.

It would have been so inexplicable to Jack to answer "*Skeletta*" that I changed the subject by putting my foot on the companion and removing some of the precious varnish. Further debate as to what I was vaguely talking about was naturally swallowed up in succinct statements about what I was doing. "If thy passenger's foot-gear offend thee, cut it off," is a maxim for any owner, so my offending shoe was removed before it could deposit its ill-gotten varnish on the blameless deck, and I hopped below.

This activity of M'Leod's, of course, roused Jack to equal efforts, and the idea of going ashore was received with even more scorn than usual. Had not all the spare spars to be done, and the topsides washed, &c.? So, as often enough before, the Don and I alone took the dinghy—still dull, dry, and usable—and left the others to enjoy the beautiful but inconvenient cosmetics with which *Skeletta* touches herself up.

Going ashore for walks is a delightful occupation, and may bring forth any kind of adventure, but going ashore on house-keeping business has a certain sameness. First, one goes to the post-office if there is one, and may get some

much-readdressed correspondence ; then to the shop, and buys whatever one happens to find, but seldom what one wants ; and then one sets out on a series of domiciliary visits to get what one has not seen and does want—butter, milk, and eggs. This time, when asking for some of these necessities at a cottage, we saw the old fisherman was mending his lobster-pots, and had several large lobsters and also some crabs. We asked if we could buy them. He was amiable and vague, and at the question " How much ? " said " He could not be naming a price," and generally conveyed the impression that he would rather keep them all as pets than sell them at all. His wife, returning with the desired eggs, was more business-like, and offered to part with the creatures for half a crown for the lot. The real difficulty of the transaction was how to " take delivery " of the animals. The old man tied up his lobsters' claws, and then held out a couple of large ones to the Don to carry. Poor Don ! " I think I understand these creatures better in the form of mayonnaise," he observed ; and with a frown of anxiety and repulsion, cautiously picked up one in each hand, holding them at arm's length between a finger and thumb, while the purple legs of the things waved impotently in the air. I found the crabs an even worse proposition. Their

claws may be less formidable, but their energy is greater, and the moment they got the chance, they scuttled along the ground with amazing speed and unpredictable direction. The practical female of the fisherman tied a string to each crab by one of its claws, and handed the ends to me. I thought I was meant to lead them like dogs on a leash, but the only certainty of the crabs' movements was the certainty of going in some unwanted direction; so I carried them swinging clear of the ground, with no more humane feelings than a hurried nurse-maid with a small child, as she drags it along by one arm, as often off the ground as on it.

How I wished I had a photograph of us both! —the worried Don, striding along with a barrage of lobster-claws stretched out in front of him, and a less preoccupied self alongside, with a pendulum crab in either hand!

When we reached the dinghy, and the Don had thankfully disembarrassed himself of his too-live stock, I found I could not follow suit: "a fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth," and mine had been too much occupied with the Don to notice my own crabs, who had each alleviated their swinging sufferings by taking good firm hold of my skirt! The Don, with courteous alacrity, tried to haul one off, which effort made a tear in the cloth, but produced no effect on

the crab, *J'y suis, j'y reste* being his family motto. Force being useless, I had resort to strategy ; I proceeded to take off my skirt. The Don looked round for shelter or escape.

" Don't be so unimaginatively conventional," I implored him. " You have often enough seen me in riding-breeches, and even in a bathing-suit ; if you want a horse as chaperone, conjure one up in your mind, but the sea would do as well, and is nice and handy."

" Madame," replied the Don, trying hard to look unabashed, " you are pleased to be facetious. I was merely wondering what was your projected procedure."

" Which," I mimicked him, " is enough to make the multitudinous seas incarnadine ! "

The Don still kept his gaze on a point safely above and beyond me.

" Now come along," I cheered him, " let's pretend this is a Wild West film, in which the heroines are always garbed in knickerbockers and the heroes in aplomb ; they would watch quite unembarrassed this real cute stunt."

I took my discarded remnant of femininity to the dinghy, and, standing in the bows, hung the crab-encrusted tail of the skirt in the water. At once the delighted and deluded beasts smelt salt water and freedom, and abandoned the un-

wanted cloth and scuttled away—the length of the string.

"Have a 'close-up' view of my victorious face," I invited the Don, while I struggled into the damp but crabless garment, and added, "And observe that I am now transformed into a womanly woman."

"Very neat indeed," was the Don's answer, but I can't make myself believe he referred to my appearance, either in the skirt or out of it.

When we got almost alongside *Skeletta*, we were kept at more than arm's length in the most literal sense, as Jack and M'Leod held us off with boat-hooks lest we touch her sparkling sticky beauty with our defiling oars or dinghy. Jack gives *Skeletta* an amount of license in the matter of make-up that he does not accord his mere wife! If I touched-up as blatantly as she does, I might remain at anchor in the house. I said as much as I was suffered to step gingerly on board, but added, with a cattish air of magnanimity, "But, of course, *she* is getting a bit *passée*, poor dear." Which remark Jack would dearly have liked to pass in contemptuous silence but could not, and then was annoyed at finding himself solemnly justifying her paint and varnish, as though it were indeed powder and rouge!

The crabs were swung triumphantly on deck by their leash, and the lobsters picked out more

delicately. By the time the latter had been carried to the fo'c'sle, the crabs had firmly clasped the little doormat which had been put down for our contaminating feet. I would have shown off my "stunt" again, but Jack was too nervous for *Skeletta's* untouchable sides, so the mat and crabs went forward together, they still clinging with ill-directed perseverance to it, and thus, while some lovely arms they stretched for aid and the others were round the door-mat, they were boiled altogether in one pot.

Amongst the letters which had been following us from post-office to post-office was one from Juanita Lethridge. She signs herself mine "affectionately," and we have the kind of friendship which is based on schooldays in common and nothing else. In those same schooldays she was called plainly Joanna, but later years have developed her naturally warm qualities of heart and vague vestigial brain along the lines of art and temperament; hence the more picturesque nomenclature. Jack she considers an arch-Philistine, and I find it difficult myself to remember always to appear adequately intense and literary. Juanita used to get prizes at school for "composition," and has never realised since that it was a strong indication that the art of literature was not for her. She professes—and perhaps gets for all I know—

spiritual uplift from "those wonderful sonnets from—something, you know: Browning, isn't it? Or is it Mrs Hemans?"

This letter was to tell me she was in Skye, and would so love to see us if we were sailing anywhere near. I suggested to Jack she might be an amusing enough passenger, especially for the Don, for he finds a sad falling-off in me this cruise, for Jack has at last infected me with a little nautical knowledge, and I consequently spend less time merely talking.

"Now, Juanita," I said to Jack, "will do nothing *but* talk, and her conversation, though meandering, is full of surprises; like all people who can form no opinions of their own, she always holds such strong ones, and as they are picked up at random from every one she meets, they defy logical predictions."

"I don't really care whether she comes or not," Jack magnanimously conceded. "She's a good enough creature, though she mostly talks rot." No form of testimonial would please Jaunita less, but the underlying truth is that most men like her very well, because she is so intensely interested in them, and that no one can find entirely boring.

After various telegraphings to and fro, we found Juanita had left Broadford, and was now with some people in a house somewhere on Loch

Snizort. I thought Slapin an ugly name, but Snizort is worse ; but it had the one advantage of being just round the corner towards the north.

With *Skeletta's* paint and varnish " so new and all," and now even the dinghy the same, we had to wait drying where we were, and arrange to meet our new guest in a couple of days. In our new plans, we had momentarily forgotten the home-sick Hamish. He had been so much less of a mock-turtle that he had existed almost unnoticed. But this hope deferred was more than he could bear, especially as a drifter Harris-bound had anchored alongside of us. We took it in turn to reason with him, but there was no use pretending that *Skeletta* would reach the Hebrides as soon as the motor-driven *Star of Eve ;* as for our cookless plight, in spite of his apparently overflowing tenderness of heart, it left him completely unmoved. The great lank Highland youth was like a small child at an uncongenial party, who answers all blandishments with the wail, " I want to go home ! "

" You leave it to me, ma'am," said M'Leod at last, in his capable cheery voice. M'Leod is rather like a large comfortable, comforting policeman.

The result was excellent. By bribery, forcefulness, or tact, M'Leod effected an exchange ; the *Star of Eve* would take our mock-turtle to

the haven where he would be, and we were to take Wullie Cosh instead, whose home was Port-Glasgow, and his soul, consequently, less poetical than the Highland Hamish, and his hiccoughing Glasgow accent was as cheery as Hamish's Gaelic whine had been melancholy. In the days that followed we experienced at last all the luxury even I had supposed was represented by a paid crew! Wullie was as care-free as Sam, and as capable as M'Leod, and somewhat like the perfect guest, "he cooked the poached and scrambled egg, and seemed to like the fo'c'sle bed; he left no little things undone, and seemed to find dish-washing fun."

Food ought not to bulk so largely in one's outlook on life, but it does; I don't know whether larger when it is bad or when unexpectedly good. Wullie gave us all the essential bits of a meal in their right order and combinations, and seemed to evolve food without recourse either to my lockers or the local stores. I think he even caught kippers and findon-haddocks in the net.

M'Leod often played the pipes in the evenings, and in mitigation of the melancholy it induced, there was a lordly feeling of Scottish laird and sturdy retainer about it. Wullie was musical too, but in a different "genre." He gave us the songs of his native land, "doon the

watter," and in as pure a dialect as Harry Lauder's. If this made us feel less like clan chieftains, it raised us to the level of music-hall gods. I rather wished M'Leod had brought his diving-dress instead of his pipes ; but not being a White Knightish diver, it had not occurred to him to have it " in case," though, of course, he might have used it instead of oilskins and sou'-wester !

The only untoward incident when we finally got under way was due to my luxury-loving desire to keep my hands warm. It was a showery day, with a very cold wind, and my hands on the tiller were becoming congealed. So I gave up steering, and put on long, comfortable, woolly gloves. When I came on deck again Wullie was below, and Jack did not want to call him up from his well-directed kitchen efforts, so told me to let go the stay-sail sheets as we went about. Many a time and oft have I performed this simple manœuvre, but I now learnt that I did not know quite all about it : in woolly gloves one cannot control a rope. Even with the usual turn on the cleat, the rope behaved as it did with Sandy, and flew out with inexorable swiftness, loosening the sail too soon. The large blocks at the clew of the sail waved wildly about, seemingly intent on braining the surprised M'Leod, who was managing the jib.

"Haul it in!" yelled Jack, adding, to steady my nerves, "You'll kill the man in a moment."

But M'Leod had fought as well as dived, and now at this unexpected aerial attack had thrown himself on his face on deck.

"*Haul!*" shouted Jack; but though I hauled with all my being, the rope slipped in nightmare fashion through my woolly helpless paws. When roused, Jack's voice would drown even the Stock Exchange, far less bring up the nimble Wullie and a scared and almost-hurried Don. The former at once seized the other foresail sheet, and hauled the block back from its man-slaughtering outbreak, while I thankfully gave up my useless efforts. Humbly and sincerely I apologised to M'Leod; but "Lord bless you, ma'am!" he laughed, "I've sailed with ladies before and taught a sight of boys, and I'm not killed yet—even by the Boche!"

We anchored about tea-time near the house our future passenger was staying in. They had watched us making our zig-zag approach as we beat into the loch, and were now standing on a little landing-stage, waiting for us to go ashore. Jack had not meant to go with me on the errand of picking up Juanita, but as a sort of reception seemed preparing, I thought something more than myself should be received. He groaned and assented, and dutifully went to fetch more pre-

sentable shoes than he honoured us with. Unfortunately, M'Leod seemed to have an argument with the anchor-winch just then, and, like all his class, proceeded to get the upper hand of it with a large heavy wrench. At the sound of the blows on its obstinate but defenceless head, Jack leapt on deck with one shoe in his hand and the other on his foot, and ran forward to the rescue of his pet winch. Anything to do with the anchor or the winch invariably produced a good deal of profanity in the old days of complete equality and no crew, but the language on board nowadays would gratify even Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. So it was with surprise, tinged with awe, that the Don and I heard violent expletives rend the air. The hammering certainly stopped. The kneeling M'Leod was gazing, petrified, at his explosive skipper, who, clasping his unshod foot in his hand, was hopping about the deck, impelled by an agony now too deep even for oaths ! The Don was most concerned, and it was he, not the sympathetic wife, who ran forward, and inquired intelligently, " Have you hurt yourself, old man ? " Jack looked at him. He did not answer, " by silence sanctifying, not concealing, the grief that must have sway."

When speech returned, Jack announced he was *not* going ashore—" that blarsted lead for

the staysail sheet" had about broken his toe, he thought. So the Don went with me when the dinghy was ready to take us ashore. He was inclined to be a little hurt at Jack's ungrateful reception of his well-meant sympathy.

"Some sorrows are too deep for words," I reminded him, "and a jammed toe is certainly one of them—you wouldn't really like polite inquiries yourself at such a moment."

This he would not admit. "I cannot believe that well-meant inquiries would ever make me angry."

"Then you are not typically human," was all I could say.

The Don, whether very human or not, is always the little gentleman, and scrambled out of the dinghy, meaning to help me up the steps, left slimy by the tide. Unfortunately, I had tactlessly jumped out ahead of him, while he scrambled, and was already shaking hands at the top. I turned to introduce the Don, who had just arrived, but just as he stepped forward with polite *empressement*, bent at the angle of his usual little bow, his foot met some even "wetter water" or "slimier slime," and suddenly the Don, all neat and courteous, slipped away from us, down the steps, tobogganing on his tummy! At each step he seemed to pause, just long enough to emit a clearly articulated

swear-word, and then bump onwards! The dramatic suddenness of this descent left us all standing in silent amazement, punctuated by the forceful monosyllables from the ladder. Wullie received him at the bottom.

"Oh, Mr Stuart! Are you hurt?" came in sincerely sympathetic inquiry from Juanita.

But answer there came none, and this was scarcely odd, because—the Don really *is* quite human.

Juanita was a very different guest from Miss Keatley of bitter memory, or even from Bridget: Miss Keatley depreciated everything; Bridget took most things with cheerful indifference; but Juanita was rapturously and indiscriminatingly enthusiastic. She pleased Jack by admiring our gleaming white paint; then minimised the effect by equally admiring the "delicious unusual shade" of our newly varnished wood, which had taken on that "delicious" but misplaced bloom that varnish persists in doing if it gets wet while drying! In spite of hitting her head in every doorway, she extolled the palatial height of our "ceilings"—though lack of headroom is *Skeletta's* chief defect. Altogether, Juanita was determined to admire, even though unable to appreciate, her new surroundings, and what can guest do more?

For her first night we lay at anchor just

round the corner, that the inevitable discomforts of boat-life to one unaccustomed to them might be broken to her gently. Wullie's dinner, M'Leod's pipes, and a spectacular sunset did nothing to prepare her for those occasions when all things do not so completely work together for good.

"How romantic and soul-satisfying a life this is!" Juanita exclaimed throatily as we sat smoking on deck after dinner.

"One *does* feel rather soulful when well-fed," I admitted; "even Jack is looking at the stars as though he saw them."

Jack heard his name, though, as usual, little else.

"Yes," he said, almost as "soulfully" as Juanita; "that *is* something like coffee."

Juanita gave the politest of little shrugs and the faintest of sighs. I wished I could be bothered being tactful and metaphysical; "the meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a transcendental kind." But, instead, the devil prompted me to quote Stevenson's remarks that he was sure that food was much more generally entertaining than scenery, and that to detect the flavour of an olive was quite as meritorious as finding beauty in the colours of the sunset.

The Don accepted the challenge, as I knew he would.

"There I venture to disagree with R. L. S.," he began, and with Juanita's devout assent to this, they were happily launched out into that satisfactory and safe kind of argument which has both speakers on the same side.

"Darling," said Jack, with such a world of emotion in his voice that I hoped Juanita would hear and count it to him for righteousness, "darling, *do* have some more coffee!"

Before we got up next morning, and while the sun poured through the skylights, Juanita was already wondering why any one lived in houses, and spoke bitterly of "the ghastly mess so-called civilisation had created by making a nation of simple seafaring men—the descendants of Vikings, or was it Danes?—live huddled in slums, &c., &c.

I did murmur something about the rather unsound economic position of people like ourselves, unless we occasionally returned to the "slums"; but the question was perhaps better answered for her when we were getting under way while we dressed—at least she was reduced to silence.

There was a good sailing breeze, and even Wullie's admirably cooked kippers have a certain penetrating odour. Jack takes that sort of weakness as a reflection on *Skeletta*, but I was sorry for Juanita, and the Don, with much

concern, found that "*mal-de-mer* is indeed distressing."

"Less so for some people if you call it *mal-au-cœur*," I laughed. The Don refused me even a smile, and murmured some platitude about jesting at wounds.

I wondered inwardly if *Skeletta* was off again on one of her notorious match-making efforts. She is quite unconscionable about it; propinquity is all she asks, and gives never a thought to congruity. The Don and Juanita would be a helpless combination indeed! "Would the . . . talk . . . that they're so rich in light the fire in the kitchen?" But perhaps there is still a foundation of plain Joanna in Juanita, and *she* could "turn the spit" which neither "the little god of love" nor the little Don would ever be good at.

The victim of *Skeletta's* motion, if not of her schemes, presently struggled on deck, lured by the optimistic promises of the more robust that she "would be quite fit on deck," or that "a little brandy and a biscuit would put her right in a moment." The Don got her into the cockpit, and I fetched the brandy, but Jack nullified all our efforts by telling her there would be "a bit of a jabble" in the Little Minch.

"Are we not through the worst of it *yet?*" asked the patient wanly.

"Oh, we're not really *in* the Minch yet," Jack answered cheerily. "When we leave that point" (pointing to the receding corner of Skye), "there's practically nothing between you and Ireland, and with this wind there's bound to be a bit of a jabble, as I said."

Fresh air and brandy now both failed completely, and when we had carried below what remained of Juanita, Jack was again left in undisturbed possession of the deck. He is not really brutal; merely unimaginative.

We had the "jabble" right enough. As the Don and I both love steering, we each urged the other to do so, and thus took it in turn apparently merely to oblige. Jack, of course, sat below, ostensibly engaged in the intricacies of navigation, but possibly with intervals for mental relaxation with a novel, or complete rest in sleep. The crew sat aft, where there was still some dry deck, and added to the picturesqueness of the scene in their white duck trousers, blue jerseys, and betasselled scarlet caps. Our late "collapsible" crews reserved the ample trousseaux we had provided for "walking out," and even walking away, but these exemplary beings gave us full value, and with only a slight strain of the imagination I could feel like an advertisement for Someone & Somebody's Ginger Ale!

As we approached Loch Tarbert, it was time

to hail the Skipper, and, as we were in smooth water, time even to recall Juanita from her nightmare.

For some reason Jack was feeling more than usually tuitional, and thought it was high time we made an anchorage ourselves, instead of depending on him. The Don was called below and instructed, and reappeared anon with chart, compasses, rulers, and books sidling from his arms, and an expression of mystification and gloom on his face. The Don's cherubic rosy face, with his wide-open short-sighted eyes and large specs, always looks like a prematurely aged child's ; but when Jack thrusts these half-understood and wholly dreaded responsibilities on him, he looks so worried, lost, but conscientious, that I find it difficult not to pat him and say, " There, there, dearie, it will all come right quite soon." I don't say anything of the kind, for under that air of over-worry there is a quite firm stratum of self-confidence, and this quality he exercises at my expense, and the diffidence he keeps for Jack.

" This place seems a regular archipelago of islands," I greeted him. " Have you got it quite clear which way we go ? "

The Don's look of concentrated worry remained, but I knew I had touched the underlying dogmatism.

" The thing seems comparatively simple," he remarked, and was just going to show me the simplicity of it when the chart rolled up with a click.

Even the charts on the White Knight's boat have a resemblance to wonderland, for, like the hedgehogs at the duchess's croquet-party, who unrolled when wanted for the game, they roll up when wanted for reference. At one time we tried keeping them folded, but the very soundings that were wanted invariably vanished into the interstices of the cracked fold.

We began again. But as I have said before, the chief—*one* of the chief !—disadvantages of a sailing-boat is that she won't stand still, and while the Don scrabbled with the chart and got in the way of the tiller, we were skimming along in a quite unknown channel. When the chart was unfolded, the pages of the Sailing Directions had blown over, and we wasted some minutes trying to identify land which did not exist before we realised it.

" That must be Scotasay now," I said, " and we must get the highest part of it in line with Mhic Mhac Mas Something . . . but where on earth *is* Mhic Mhac etcetera ? "

" There's something about the Free Church," the Don muttered, flicking the pages back against the wind, which still seemed to think blowing

them over was the game. "Yes, here it is; but it is not of immediate use—all it says is that 'within the Free Church the loch narrows. . . .'" The Don continued musingly: "Very odd; I have noticed that effect on many people 'within' other Churches. It is an interesting comment on the Free that it should so affect even the loch."

"Never mind philosophising," I said impatiently. "Look! is *that* the Free Church?"

Our education was dear to Jack, but *Skeletta* considerably dearer, and this remark of mine brought him up from below explosively.

"Free Church!" he shouted; "how the devil can you see the Free Church? Good heavens! We're practically on the Glorigs!"

The shock of this news was too much for *Skeletta*. Abandoned by her lord and master to women and dons, she gave one shudder of disgust and dismay, and—stood still! Not so any one else. Jack took two tottering steps and fell flat on his face, the Don dropped the useless symbols of navigation and sat down abruptly amongst them, while M'Leod and Wullie clung to each other in a short and silent fox-trot! The silence, if short, was "significant of much." Then Jack, nursing a bruised elbow, ejaculated—something, and added, "Stuck!" One of the most dreadful things in the world

is to have to say *something* to the victim of one's inexcusable crushing mistake! It ought to count towards retribution that one must just listen to oneself uttering inane fatuities, and it matters little to the humiliation how they are received. But some things are so bad that there is no scope for them but complete civility, and even to a wife there was nothing for Jack to say but, "Never mind, it doesn't matter," although he almost gulped over the formula!

After the first stricken moments, things were better, as at least there was much to be done. Of course, the tide was falling. People *may* have gone aground on a rising one, but somehow one does not hear of them, I suppose, because their plight is merely ignominious, whereas, with a falling tide, it has the dignity of tragedy.

Jack, now freezingly civil to every one, asked the Don, "Would you mind telling me what the tide is here?"

The leaves of the Sailing Directions fluttered agitatedly. I think the poor man even licked his fingers—and then he read out over-hurriedly, "Spring tide rises thirteen and a half feet, and leaps ten feet."

"Leaps ten feet!" I cried. "Good heavens!"

"No . . . no . . . *Neaps*, I should have said," the poor man stuttered, very conscious of Jack's

polite and silent attention and pregnant " Thank you ! "

Without further enlisting our aid, Jack and the men set about mysterious operations with all the spare spars. The Don and I found ourselves degraded to the rank of passengers, and felt our humiliation deserved but bitter.

Juanita now came on deck, looking recovered and completely at ease. She looked at our isolated position with surprise.

" Oh, I thought we had come alongside ! "

" We have—rather forcibly," I said. " If you look over this side, you will see what we are up against."

About four feet below the surface was a miniature mountain-range, and we were sitting ark-like on its Ararat ! On the other side the sea appeared as bottomless as usual, except towards the bows.

" Are we not going to shove off again ? " Juanita asked.

We had to admit we were kept outside the Committee of Public Safety, and could only guess its policy, but inferred that we were making preparations to stay where we were for a bit.

" But we seem very steady," said Juanita. " Why are they putting props along outside ? "

" To be thus is nothing ; but to be safely

thus——" quoth the Don ; and then proceeded to explain the vagaries of tides and the effect on a deep-keeled boat if bereft of supporting water. The whole phenomenon of tides was a complete mystery to Juanita, I knew, also the matter of keels and their shapes ; but the Don has the most courteous and useful manner of providing mere women with the facts of the case in the course of conversation, and then listening to their opinions, new-formed thereon, with endearing deference.

Juanita's misunderstanding of the state of matters was also rather endearing and soothing : " I think it's so *extraordinary* the way you two understand *all* about these nautical matters ! What a comfort it must be to Jack to have such a capable pair to help him ! "

As we sat thus " helpfully " talking, and ostentatiously ignored by the unappreciative Jack, *Skeletta,* in spite of the strenuous efforts to prevent her, began to show signs of fainting. She had borne the first shock gallantly, but as she saw the ever-supporting element prepare to desert her, her much-tried nerves gave way, and she gently swooned—fortunately towards the rock, and not towards the chasm opening on the seaward side. This choice on her part was not only the tact shown by any elegant female in fainting, but was no doubt due, in some

measure, to a rope tied high up her mast, and hauled out to an anchor on the island. The various crutches which had been improvised along the same side failed to support her entirely, for, like the said elegant female, *Skeletta* is pretty heavy when you try to hold her up. More and more she subsided, till we felt like sliding off the deck. Jack continued to ignore our presence, except to apologise politely for disturbing us whenever their energetic doings necessitated our moving out of his way. It was all very crushing, and Juanita's incense of admiration was more soothing to the Don than to me, who would have been more cheered by a friendly swear-word from Jack.

This aloofly displeased person now came and spoke to us.

"I am afraid I must ask you all to go ashore; at this angle the boat is not very safe, and might possibly go over; for your own sakes as well as hers, it would be better to be off her."

"Ashore?" said Juanita. "How interesting! How far away is it?"

"Just down the ladder," replied Jack unsmilingly.

"How amusing!" said the innocent Juanita, "to explore this funny little island!"

The Don and I said nothing. We might not know *all* about nautical matters, but we knew

a few salient unpleasant facts, the chief of which was that it was only half-tide when we went aground, and before it would be half-tide again and refloat us, we should have six hours or so in which to exhaust the interests of a knobby rocky islet a few feet square! I looked at my watch; I noticed the Don did the same, and then, because as usual his was not going, he asked me the time in a low hopeless whisper.

"Half-past four—or thereabouts," I whispered back. (Jack is the only person who ever has the *right* time; the rest of us have just time of a sort. I suppose Jack maintains his is right, because he has so much more data to judge from than any one else, for he keeps innumerable watches and clocks all going, each "in case" the others come to untimely ends.)

The Don's lips moved as though in prayer as we slid, one by one, off the roof-like deck and down the ladder. "Not before eleven o'clock at earliest," were the only words I overheard.

XV.

It was a most absurd little party we made on that absurd little island. At first we wandered about the small domain, Juanita charmed with every sea-anemone or sea-pink on it, and the Don and I simulating a gaiety we were far from feeling. Jack stood gazing moodily at his poor *Skeletta*, who now looked, I am sorry to say, considerably less like a fainting *élégante* than a "drunk and incapable."

The two men were sitting talking intermittently, and throwing small stones into the sea—an amusement which dies hard in even grown-up boys.

After a couple of hours of this, the stone-throwing seemed to pall; Juanita no longer could find enthusiastic endearments even for small crabs, and the Don and I had relapsed from our histrionic gaiety. Jack alone remained unchanged, always watching—like a less picturesque Madame Butterfly.

It was a singularly unyielding, unupholstered,

little island! Many of the West Coast rocks are cushioned luxuriously with springy turf, but this one was of a barrenness uncompromising! While shifting my bruised bones for the thousandth time, I groaned aloud, and reminded the Don of a passage from that imaginative work, the Sailing Directions, which he had read aloud. "Do you remember it said: 'The fundamental rock of these islands is generally nice'—this here island's an exception—it's very fundamental, but not at all nice?"

"I quite agree," the Don replied mournfully, and then added apathetically: "I *think* the word was spelt g-n-e-i-s-s, although I don't in the least know what it means."

"How interesting!" Juanita exclaimed, delighted to have again something to exclaim about—"what a curious spelling,—Gaelic, I suppose, or is it just old English, like knave and knife and all those quaint unnecessary K's?"

I hoped the Don would keep up this new etymological discussion, but unfortunately he got cramp instead, and that is apt to make even the most fluent conversationalist merely exclamatory.

Our talk was desultory during the *next* two hours.

I found myself, like Miss Keatley, thinking "a cup of tea would be nice," and, like her,

precisely when it was least convenient, not to say impossible, to get.

At first *Skeletta's* ever-increasing décolletage had a sort of embarrassed fascination for us, but after a few hours even her completely divulged anatomy was scanned with lack-lustre eye, although Juanita held some spasmodic converse with the Don about what seemed odd to her unaccustomed eyes in *Skeletta's* denuded body.

"Why does the deck stick out such a long way at each end?" she asked.

The Don tried to rise to the occasion and explain the effect of water-line on speed, prefacing each fact unknown to Juanita with his tactful "as you know . . ." But for once Juanita's charming habit broke down, and the most egotistic speaker could not have persuaded himself that her real attention was anywhere but on her own anatomy, and the rocks below it. The Don shivered and stifled a yawn, and finished his dissertation—

"Herrick, I think it was, remarked that it was 'no fault in women to make show of largeness where they're nothing so'—let us consider it applies to yachts."

Juanita, though not listening, was mistress enough of herself to murmur soulfully, "Ah yes! how true that is—how beautiful!"

By nine o'clock it had been cold for some time, and by eleven it was also dark. Juanita, still unconscious of the moral chasm which separated the Don and me from human companionship, wanted Jack to come and talk to us, but he was now sitting beside M'Leod and Wullie, and all three were peering through the gloom at the slowly rising tide, and from time to time set up little cairns of stone to mark its advance. We looked to half-past eleven as the hour of our release, and the prospect of having warm food within and soft cushions without was rapturous—but tantalising, for the tide was not up to scheduled time.

I had always imagined that Time and Tide played fair in the matter of punctuality, and if they waited for none, none need wait for them. Another disillusionment ! I don't know who else besides railway posters said that "Punctuality is the civility of Kings"; but anyhow it does not apply to His Majesty King Neptune, for that wretched autocratic tide kept us waiting a good hour; only the expression "good hour" is distinctly misplaced. Every hour spent on that miserable islet had more than its just complement of *mauvais quarts d'heures !* At last, when *Skeletta* was but a dimly seen silhouette, she gave a few rheumatic creaks, and sat up in her usual stately way, and one by

one her supporting crutches loosened and floated by her side. We also creaked and groaned with stiffness as we felt our way on board again.

How thankful I was to Wullie when he produced, in miraculously short time, a hot and succulent meal! When Jack came down below to partake thereof, he announced, "She's off all right"; and when, after a mighty drink, he added, "But you two *are* a pair of chattering idiots!" I knew all was well, and that the peccant Don and myself were once more forgiven, instead of apparently forgotten. Juanita was all sympathy with both parties.

"Poor Jack!" she said to him. "For us it was merely a little cold and—a trifle dull,—but for you it was such a long time of anxiety. What exactly was it you feared might happen?"

"That another yacht would come in and see us sitting like a family of bally limpets on those infernal Glorigs!" answered Jack bitterly.

On the chart there is the "Flat Glorig" and "Malcolm's Glorig" and several other Glorigs. On *Skeletta's* chart another is now marked, "The Don's Glorig," in his own neat hand; but we have not brought the alteration to the attention of the Lords of the Admiralty.

We spent a peaceful shore-going day after this adventure. The day before we had done little but be "ashore peacefully" also, but the

effect on the mind was of adventure, though perhaps what I might call a static adventure! As Juanita said, "After all, one must ultimately judge everything on the physical basis—no, I mean psychical, don't I?"

The Don looked at me in silent disapproval when I said, "I really don't know which: when it comes to writing, it's best to use whichever you can spell, but in talking either will do."

"As Shelley says," mused Juanita, her nice, soft, thick skin quite impervious to verbal arrows, "truth is beauty and beauty truth, so perhaps . . ." I don't know what the deduction was going to be, for Juanita has a way of letting these fine beginnings trail off into meaningless—I mean meaningful—silences.

The Don was determined to reprove me. He began: "As, of course, you know, it was Keats you were quoting when you inadvertently said Shelley. . . ." But though he did not fade away into inarticulate soulfulness, I faded away from their immediate society, and joined the blessedly prosaic and literal Jack, who was absorbed in constructing a marvellous ventilator for the fo'c'sle.

The fo'c'sle is admittedly a warm spot with both men in it and the stove at full blast. To any one but the White Knight the obvious way of ventilating it would be to open the door and

the hatch, which simple performance produces as scientific a draught as any one could wish —certainly much more than the inhabitants of the fo'c'sle will tolerate for more than two minutes. Jack had thought out a far, far better way. It was to be a " collapsible wind-sail," according to definition; and if that is what Jack saw in the billowing waves of calico that filled the cabin and trailed into the next, then wind-sails, like beauty, are in the eye of the beholder.

" Where did you conjure all this stuff from ? " I asked, amazed, for I really thought I knew most of *Skeletta's* contents by now. Jack did not cease from violent pullings and haulings, but nodded towards the after-cabin. Then I saw what appeared to be a super-spring-cleaning in progress—at least, everything one could not possibly want lay on the floor and covered the berths. The explanation was in the small open door of the sail-locker—that bottomless pit of White Knightish " forethoughted "-ness !

" I see *where* the stuff came from, and I will try to believe what it is going to become, but what *was* it ? "

Jack was now cutting at the masses of material with an enormous pair of scissors, and an expression suitable to cutting the threads of destiny. There was no answer to correspondents

offered. I am no great dressmaker, but I do know how to tear cloth instead of cutting it, and offered to lighten Jack's labours to that extent. In thanks for my masterly screed, Jack vouchsafed the information that this calico was the awning he used to have for the deck.

"You never seemed to care about *having* it up, so we may as well *use* it up," he added.

I no longer felt the least anxiety or compunction about how this stuff was cut up; I bore the awning no debt of gratitude. Jack had it made "in case" on wet calm days or hot calm days we should like to have the deck covered in, and so make an extra sitting-room. With paid minions for'ard it might have been a convenience, though I doubt it, but with only ourselves to put it up, its sole advantage was that it provided a whole-time occupation for every one on those days which might otherwise have been merely peaceful.

"I don't quite see how all this is going to make a windsail, Jack," I ventured, quite humbly.

Jack, having just pricked himself to the effusion of blood, answered something to the effect that wives, as well as certain other classes of people, should not see things half-done. So I removed myself to my proper womanly sphere

—namely, clearing up after the man, and finishing his half-done spring-cleaning.

When I had finished I was even warmer than the village blacksmith, so went on deck to cool down. The men were ashore, but Juanita and the Don were coming back in the dinghy, having exhausted the local beauties of Tarbert. They are not of a kind to appeal to every one ; and although Juanita did her best to admire the " uniqueness " and " quaintness " and other non-committal attributes, I am pretty sure the place struck her as dreary. Such a depreciatory word would not be accepted, I knew, so I suggested the country was an excellent example of what is so expressively called " morne."

" Yes, yes—that is just what I feel ! How exactly right these quaint Scotch words are ! " exclaimed Juanita delightedly. Then, " What did you say, dear ? " she added, turning to me, as I murmured, " I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word."

After supper, Jack, full of kind thoughts for the crew, proceeded to " ventilate " the fo'c'sle for them by means of his new toy. The men stood by, polite, puzzled, and silent ; the rest of us puzzled only. Jack dragged along the deck, yards and yards of material sewn up into a sort of interminable bolster-case. Part of this was lowered down the fo'c'sle hatch,

quite filling it, and blocking access to the ladder.

"Now, just make fast these guys, M'Leod," said Jack; and the mystified man tied various strings to any rigging available, till the head of the *soi-disant* wind-sail was strung up, and its elongated body hung limply down, the whole thing looking like a deflated Zeppelin.

"There you are!" said Jack, apparently quite hopeful, while the men still gaped, and we made a chorus of Little Peterkins.

"What's the good of it?" indignantly answered Jack; "when the wind fills it, it will carry a draught of cool air right down—don't you see?"

"Surely there is this disadvantage," adjudicated the Don, "that when there is insufficient wind . . ."

("As at present," I murmured.)

". . . It prevents the hot air getting out."

("Or anything or any one else," I added.)

The Crew merely gazed, hands in pockets, the vagaries of Owners being too many to be worth acute attention.

Juanita made the best suggestion of all at the end of Jack's theorising: "Ah yes," said she, full of interested misunderstanding, "I once had to use one of those things at a hotel. I am afraid I was a little nervous, but they are really

wonderful, and no doubt one would get below much quicker than by the ladder."

Jack's mouth opened, but fortunately shut again with a snap before the toads and vipers of verbal scorn could drop out.

The joy with which I pictured M'Leod and Peter taking headers into the fo'c'sle through this calico tunnel made me forget Juanita's later name, and I giggled forth, " O Joanna, my well-beloved ! this thing is meant for an air-escape, not a fire-escape ! "

But " the fire-escape " it remained by name for its short and helpless life, till ridicule from us and passive resistance from the men so embittered its lanky soul that it retired from its unappreciated efforts, and crept back to the dark corners of the sail-locker. It will probably revenge itself by starting mildew in the extra sails.

Poor Jack ! he must find other people so prosaic and lazy ! If there is a simple common way of getting what they want, they just do it, although he is so anxious and able to provide them with more interesting and involved methods ! Perhaps this is the very essence of a sailing cruise, this rather difficult way of doing simple things : if one wanted to get anywhere in particular, a motor-boat would do it better, yet it is the soul of the game to pretend

this reaching a definite place is what one wants, and I quite realise I am not playing strict cricket when I allow a complete indifference on the subject to escape me.

Having agreed to classify the Hebrides as "morne"-ful, we decided to abandon them and return to the mainland, so next day we set forth for the Gairloch. Juanita's strong point is not geography, but this seemed to her rather a long sail.

"Fairly," Jack admitted, "but with luck we should get in to-night." But when Juanita optimistically went on to say it would be convenient for the train, we realised her spelling was as defective as her geography. "The G-a-i-r-loch is in Ross-shire," enunciated the Don, "in contradistinction to 'the Garel'ch,' which is 'doon the watter'—*i.e.*, the Clyde. It would, as you surmised, be a lengthy passage to this latter." Juanita was quite pleased with her knowledge, but had Jack been as portentously courteous as the Don, she would have resented it as sarcasm.

There was only a light breeze from the south-west when we started, but Jack, the crew, and the instruments all seemed of opinion there would be more later. I rather think the barometer said so with the emphasis of a quarter-inch drop, but as the Hunnish "Hygroskop"

was stationary, Jack was less depressed than usual by his barograph ; also, I think even he has realised that these instruments are often rather unpractical in their views. What one really wants is a barograph more parochially minded. Ours thinks in vasty areas, while what we want to know is the weather in our own particular spot, and not whether there is "a depression moving over Ireland," or "an anticyclone rising in Germany." While Jack and the excellent M'Leod were getting every possible sail set, and the Don was explaining their functions to Juanita, Wullie came to me with the usual cook's apologetic whisper, "Please, mum, can I speak a minute." He led me to the fo'c'sle and showed me the dismembered remnants of a crab. "I thought you would like a bit parten to your supper, and M'Leod got this yen in the net, but it's kind of come in pieces, and its in'ards are sort of wasted in the water."

It was a horrid-looking mess, and really only fit to go overboard, but I surveyed it as sympathetically as I could. "Why did you boil it so long, Wullie ? You did the lobster all right."

"Ay, but ye mun boil them an awful lot," answered Wullie ; and then with sinister intonation, "They kinds o' fish are that poisonous ! "

Then I remembered the widespread belief among the fisher-folk, that crabs eat drowned

sailors! Though not necessarily poisonous in consequence, I admit it makes them seem a trifle macabre, so I relieved Wullie's feelings by telling him to return the remnants to the deep. The dog-fish have neither fine sentiments nor perfervid imaginations, and will swallow any food as easily as humans swallow superstitions.

During most of the day we sailed only by flukes and slants of wind, and made no perceptible progress across the expanse of calm hazy-blue water towards the fainter blue hills of the mainland. Harris remained irritatingly near at hand, and only gradually became less distinct as the setting sun merged the details with the shadows. Juanita was having a heart-to-heart talk with the Don as they both sat propped against the skylights, the deck tempered to them with the cabin cushions. Jack was, as usual, below, cleaning the side-lights, as there seemed every likelihood of our needing them. I was doing what little steering was required, and also half reading a book, which is all I can ever manage in the open air. The miles of sea and sky all round catch and hold one's eyes, and one can spend hours thinking in a vague, pleasant, hazy way, which suits the scene.

With these various occupations and pre-occupations I only caught occasional snatches of the low-voiced conversation near at hand.

At one time I heard Juanita moralising on the romance of "this sailing out into the Western sky," regardless of the fact that we were going due East; but I can hardly blame her, for *Skeletta* had waltzed round several times in her efforts to catch and keep the fickle breeze. Talk must have become political after that, though I only heard one sentence—"But advocates are not supposed to have any politics, are they? Or judges, is it? Well, it's much the same."

Steering in very light airs often takes up much of one's attention, so it was some time before I heard more, and then I realised the little Don was "getting warm," as we used to say in childish guessing games. But I did not hear his remark, only Juanita's: "But Dons are not allowed to marry, are they? I know, because a friend of mine" . . . (No use putting over the head-sails, M'Leod; she'll be back again in a moment!) . . . "a Fellow, was it? I knew it was something to do with teaching."

I found myself feeling priggishly superior, and thinking Juanita a prize idiot. But, after all, the Don was immensely taken with her, and I wondered why. Perhaps it is because she listens with such profound interest and acquiescence to his views instead of having any of her own! Naturally he does not think her a fool when she accepts all he says as either

wonderfully original or as what she has always thought.

Wullie, having had no deck work to waste his time, had made honourable amends for the crab by cooking a specially toothsome evening meal. While we were at it a really decent breeze sprang up.

Whoever is steering when this happens always feels and generally behaves as though it were some special virtue and skill in himself, like putting down a really good dummy hand!

"That's a fine breeze you've caught," Jack shouted to M'Leod as in duty bound, sportingly answering to the sudden activity on deck. "Keep it till we've finished supper, and then I'll take her."

By the time we had finished the table was at a perilous angle, or what appeared to be so, and it was almost impossible to prevent Juanita making grabs at it "to straighten it." It was nearly nine o'clock and time to bundle on all possible clothes if we were to stay on deck, and not even "a mouse of any soul" would stay below when the first good sailing comes after a day's drift.

When one has prayed for wind all day one frequently ends, like the Scotch minister, by feeling "that this, O Lord, is fair ridiculous" when the measure supplied is pressed down and

running over. In less than half an hour we had changed from flat calm and drifting to tearing along at the most precarious angle, the lee-gunwale under and the head-sails dripping: indeed, "pressed down and running over!" The first job was to get the very superfluous top-sail off her, and I took the helm while the men set about this, which is no light matter in a high wind and heavy sea. I gazed upwards, more interested in the manœuvre than the steering. "Luff her up! Shake her!" ordered Jack, as the heavy yard refused to slide past the mainsail. I obeyed, still fascinated by the topsail's doings. Jack is always counselling me to steer by the feel of the wind on my face or my neck or somewhere, but this time it did not work well, and, after watching their furious and ineffectual pullings at the flopping sail, suddenly we went about on the other tack! Everything crashed over, and the mainsail hid the men from my sight. I shouted distracted apologies into the wind, and clung to the tiller as we heeled over and over before an extra squall, which buried us the deeper from our loss of way. For a dreadful moment I thought the men had all gone overboard, till I saw below the boom a dado of legs making swirls and rapids of the stream of water in the scuppers. But the topsail was down all right! The shock of going

about at such a moment had been too much for its nerves. Something broke, and it slid helplessly to the deck without further resistance.

It was all very exciting for the first two or three hours, but when that sort of thing goes on into the dark it may be more dangerous, and so should be more exciting, but somehow one's enjoyment of thrills dies away ; adventure departs, and the whole business becomes merely cold and clammy. There were alleviating moments certainly. Jack steered, as he needs must when it really matters how the steering is done ; and he did it with his usual concentrated seriousness and economy of speech. Juanita sat opposite to me in the cockpit, and had the ill-luck to choose the side which was the lee one for several dark and gloomy hours. This meant an attitude which no other circumstances but a sailing-yacht or Cardinal La Balue's cage would ever make one assume—the knees pointing heavenward, the body thrown forward to meet them, and the arms clutching the seat to prevent the poor distorted creature tumbling out backwards. To her I must have appeared to be lying back at negligent ease, as I corrected my opposite kind of ill-balance. Poor Juanita ! Talk was useless in the extraordinary row *Skeletta* always makes when over-driven and arguing with the wind, but Juanita's eyes

were those of a tortured animal till they were very effectually veiled from my sight as the wind playfully tipped her sou'-wester over her nose! Poor dear! She obviously dared not let go even one hand to right it. I also felt I could not bend down so far, so there she sat like a patient horse with a nose-bag on! I giggled convulsively, and tried to tell Jack to put the helpless creature out of pain, but he would not hear me, and when he found I was in fits of laughter, thought I was becoming hysterical—the only explanation for such misplaced mirth!

The Don, even more unhappy, had been sent below to find out where we were! He would, I am sure, have willingly put his head in a nose-bag instead! Whenever we dimly saw a light, Jack sternly bade me find its bearing. After saying east for west in my efforts to please, this would eventually be done, or at least considered done when I had chosen a direction which corresponded to Jack's assumed one; then the wretched Don with this datum was expected to evolve a credible theory as to our position. It never seemed to work. The Don's worried face would appear at the companion, but as he always began, "I can't quite make out . . ." or "Did you say east-south-east?" the conversation never got very far, and sometimes by the time Jack had finished

commenting on the lack of help afforded him, the light had wandered away on the steamer it belonged to.

It was a very long night, and towards dawn even such incidents as the jib carrying away failed to cheer one. Juanita had managed to climb up from the lee depths into the bottom of the cockpit, and although stiff and cold and wet, showed her real sweetness of character by sympathising with the Don when he appeared with a lump like a billiard-ball over one eye. "Well, have you found our position?" snapped the skipper. The Don replied piteously, "I lost my balance as we went about, and bumped into the locker door, and . . ." "Confound your bump! *is* that S. Rona light?" demanded the unsympathetic skipper. "*Poor* man! what a dreadful bump!" thus Juanita; and she heroically scrambled and slithered down the companion to relieve the sufferer with arnica and sympathy.

As daylight grew, the Don's efforts became as unnecessary as they had been ineffectual, for we could now see where we were, which is a much more satisfactory method, and re-established more cordial relations. I do really sympathise with Jack's position. When nothing is doing, or when everything is doing well, we all tease him for fussing over charts or reading

Sailing Directions ; then when things go wrong, none of us know anything, and expect him to steer and read and plot simultaneously ! But it would be injudicious to admit this sympathy, for he would almost certainly at once begin to teach me something ! We are really better as we are : it takes two sorts to make a successful marriage or a yacht's crew, for even there they also serve who only sit and talk, and Jack would find too many merely useful people very dull. " To labour and be content with that a man hath is a sweet life ! "

We had meant to make Shieldaig, Gairloch, and instead we made Loch Torridon, but owing to that monotony of nomenclature so noticeable in the Imaginative Celt, we made a Shieldaig all the same, and " abode there many days." I am not sure how many, for sailless, lazy, sunny days passed in those remote and beautiful spots engender a Godlike view of time, and ten days are but as a week-end. Jack was happy trying the dinghy with new and awkward fin-like contraptions called lee-boards. They added much work and wetness to the joys of dinghy-sailing, but it made the White Knight very much happier than simple-minded ballast, and it gave me the sound excuse of wifely devotion to keep out of the way of the other two.

Juanita " paints a little," and the Don talks

a lot, so they combined admirably, while Juanita conveyed her ideas of Highland cattle to paper, and the Don conveyed his ideas on everything to her. When we met again in the evenings, the day's work, if not its talk, was produced for our inspection, and Jack conscientiously bestowed those indiscriminating words of praise which are so damning, and the Don tried to diffuse an atmosphere of the Higher Criticism: "The chiaroscuro is really excellent," he would say thoughtfully. Juanita's cryptic reply was, "I never can remember the names of different kinds of cows."

This idyllic life continued for, as I said, some unremembered number of days; then the end came with dramatic—nay, tragic—suddenness.

Our ever-following letters overtook us. We read them in our various manners on deck. Jack's seemed to be of well-known and unwelcome nature, for they mostly went overboard after a glance, and even the dog-fish failed to be attracted to "accounts rendered." Mine were of the usual holiday correspondence kind, for which I am never properly grateful. Nothing but mild boredom dictated them, and whether bored or not I should have to answer them. Juanita seemed to find hers more absorbing and pleasing. I watched her, and came to the

conclusion she had won a magazine competition or something equally elating, when she put her hand on my arm, and murmured, "My dear, I'm *so* happy! I must tell you all about it; come downstairs." (Downstairs!)

So *that* was it! I glanced at the bows, where, all unconscious of his doom, the little Don stood whistling.

I shall respect Juanita's maidenly confidences and ecstasies. *He* had been staying at several different houses with her—"it all" happened at Loch Snizort just before we arrived, but she had not been sure, and had promised to write. She made up her mind the night we spent "in that dreadful gale in the Minch," and she thought she might never see him again. So *that* was what occupied her poor head when it was shut up in the nose-bag! The poor Don! His lump would have hurt less without that misleading arnica, I am afraid.

After the first gush of incoherent details had subsided, I asked the usual banal questions—by what other name than Crichton this admirable gentleman might be known? "What makes you think his name is Crichton?" asked Juanita, mildly surprised; then softly and rapturously continued, "His name is Ian"—pause—"Ian Kennedy." I collapsed upon the berth beside me, and I am really sorry to admit

I exclaimed in heartfelt and most unladylike manner, "Good God! the Dhuiné-Wassail!" Juanita looked up with less rapturous and more focussed attention. "I said, 'Poor Don,'" I hastened to lie, and hurried on to say we knew Mr Kennedy. Another interval for ecstatic converse, adding little to one's knowledge of the facts.

I had a difficult business preparing the other occupants of *Skeletta* for this news. Jack's views did more justice to his liking for his friend than his belief in his judgment, and as for the Don . . .

As Jack said to me after, "Well, what did you want? You don't seem overjoyed at the D.W. going under—surely you didn't want it to be the Don instead? The D.W. can at least look after himself." Of course, Jack is quite right—it would have been far worse if it had been the Don. He really is not fitted to get through life with a woman who wants "to live on a higher plane"; he can do that himself, and needs some one to supply the workaday common-sense. But I *did* want him to have what he wanted!

I tried to explain this to Jack, for I had a horrid feeling of inward guilt that needed explaining away. "I think I know what you're driving at," Jack grudgingly admitted, "but

for goodness sake, don't go on being a mother to my friends—it's rather rough on them."

We had every appearance of having a jolly congratulatory dinner, and Juanita thought the Don's neat, set, little speech "too sweet for anything."

Of course, "Ian" was anxious to meet his fiancée as soon as possible, so we pushed off at once for Kyle of Lochalsh, where the train she had hoped to find convenient at Gairloch really existed.

The Don had his own solution, and announced that he had always wanted to walk round the Applecross peninsula, and was loth to give up the idea, so, as we had to move on, he would just stay and do it by himself, and perhaps join us again farther south. I need hardly add that he did not rejoin us.

We sailed by slow stages south, but there was rather a gloom over our doings. Other friends could not be found whose dates fitted with ours; some others offered more dates than we wanted to fill, and when left by our two selves, the existence of the once-longed-for crew seemed rather ironic. Jack really wanted to do their work, and I got a little tired of having none. After rounding the Mull again in what seemed to me a mountainous sea, I said to M'Leod, "Don't you get tired of always going

to sea?" "Ay, sometimes," he said, "but" —looking contemptuously round our vessel— "I don't call *this* going to sea." Another illusion shattered!

Then came the winter—*Skeletta* in her cupboard, the Dhuiné-Wassail married, and our own long poetic evenings, joined in later by a convalescent Don.

The White Knight would rebut very strongly the accusation of being poetic, but those long evenings are so according to Wordsworth's own definition of poetry, and surely he should know! According to him poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquillity," and I know no one capable of inspiring so many and various emotions as *Skeletta!*

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